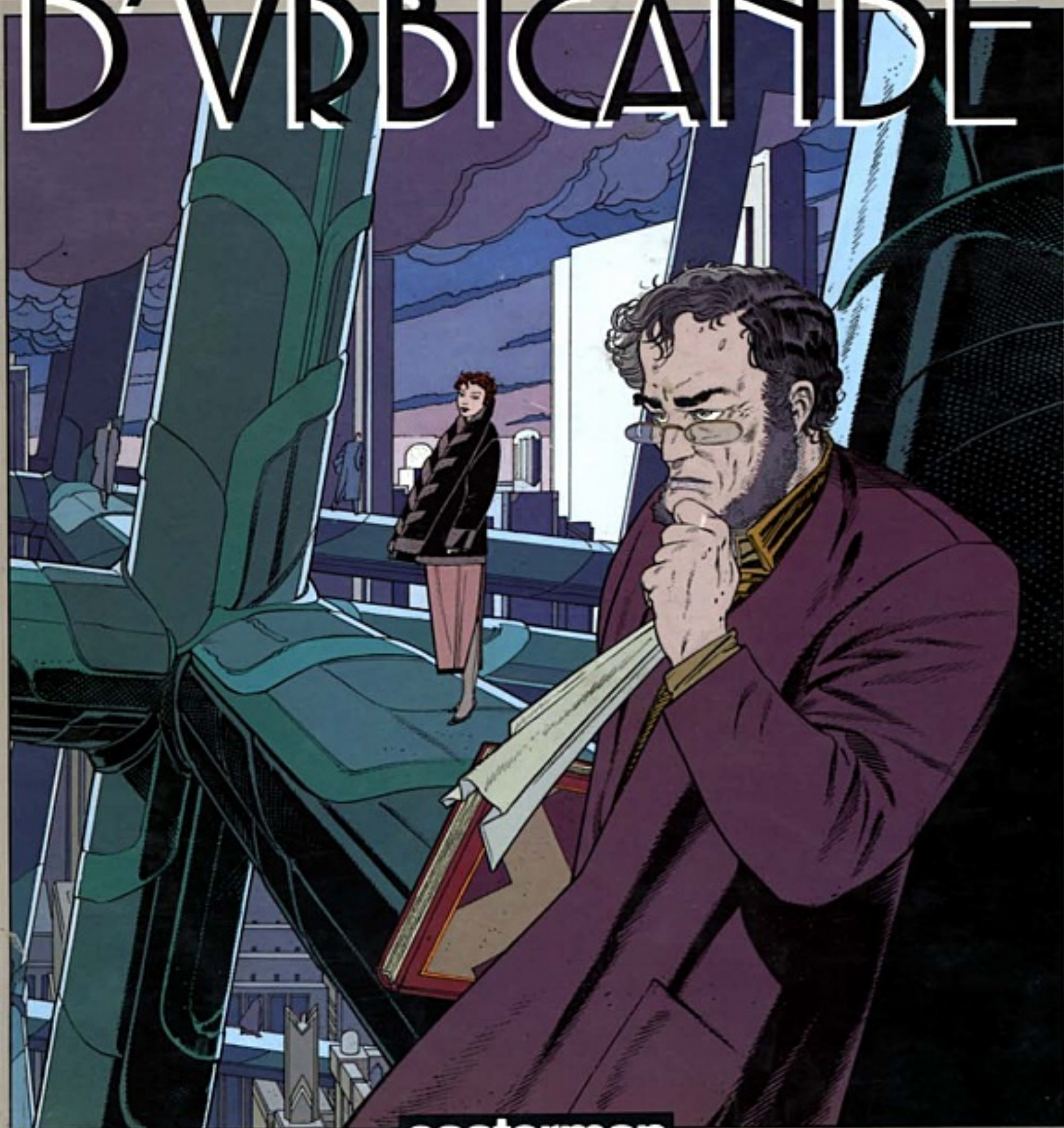


Les Cités obscures

SCHUITEN **LA FIÈVRE** PEETERS
D'VRBICANDÉ



casterman

Les Cités obscures

SCHUITEN

Fever in Urbicand

PEETERS

CREDITS

SCANS (FROM CHEVAL NOIR)

ISSUE #1 - AVENANT

ISSUE #2 - DARWINATION (DCP) & CRUMB TASTER (MINUTEMEN)

ISSUE #3 - DARWINATION (DCP) & CRUMB TASTER (MINUTEMEN)

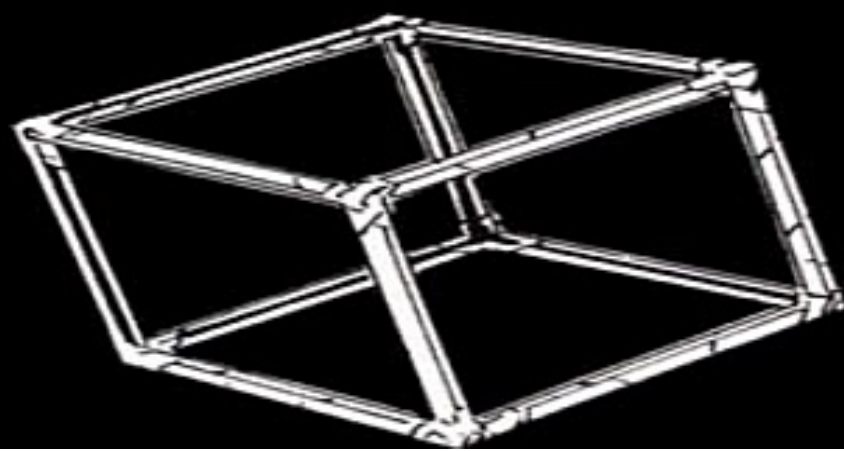
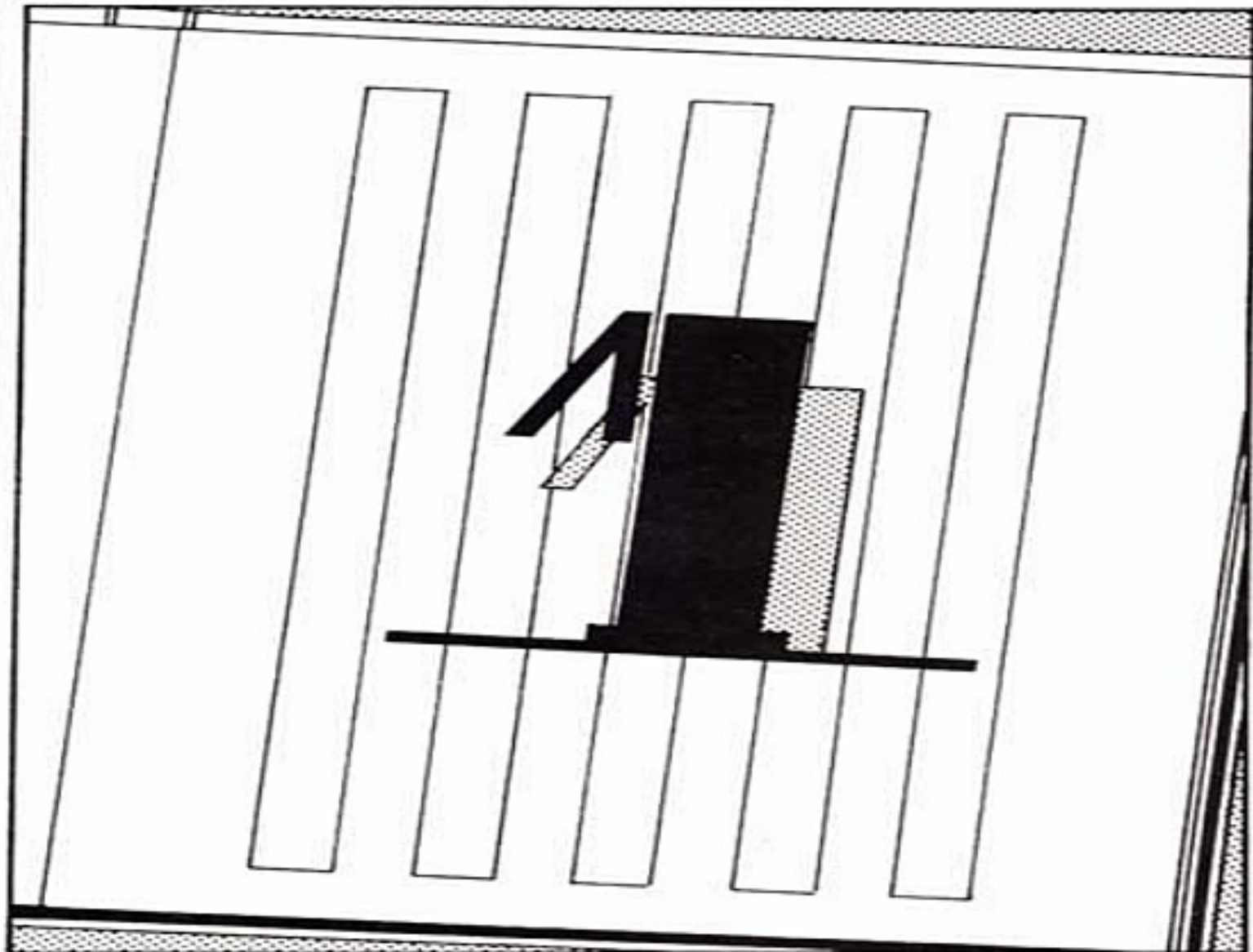
ISSUE #4 - DARWINATION (DCP) & CRUMB TASTER (MINUTEMEN)

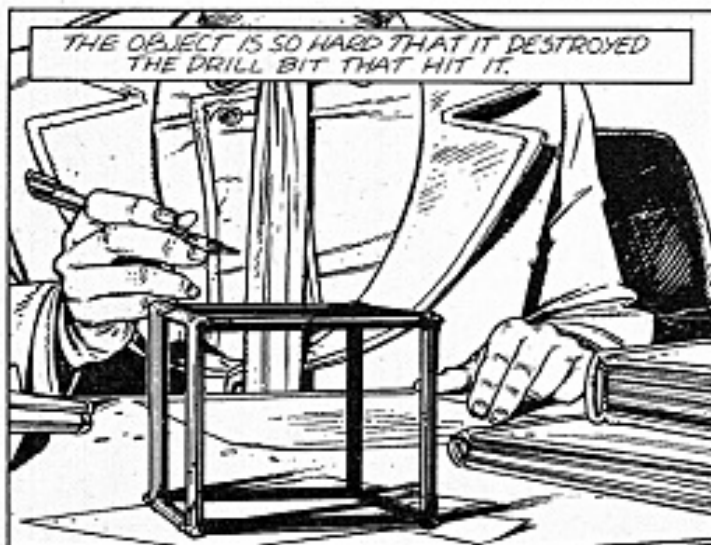
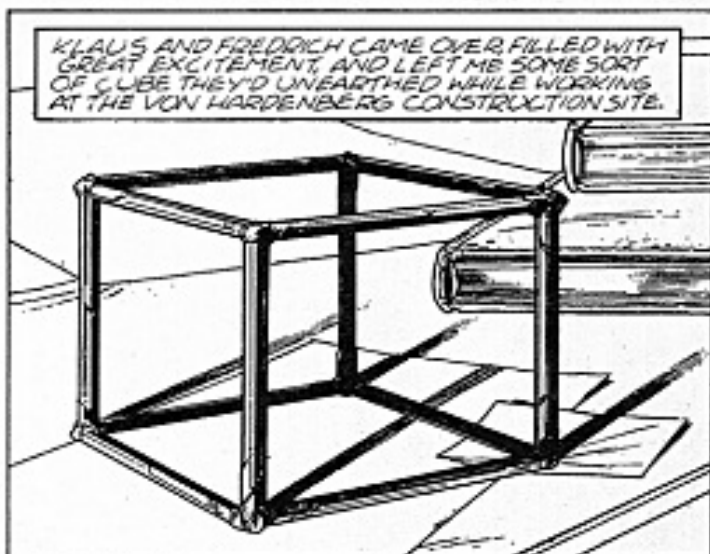
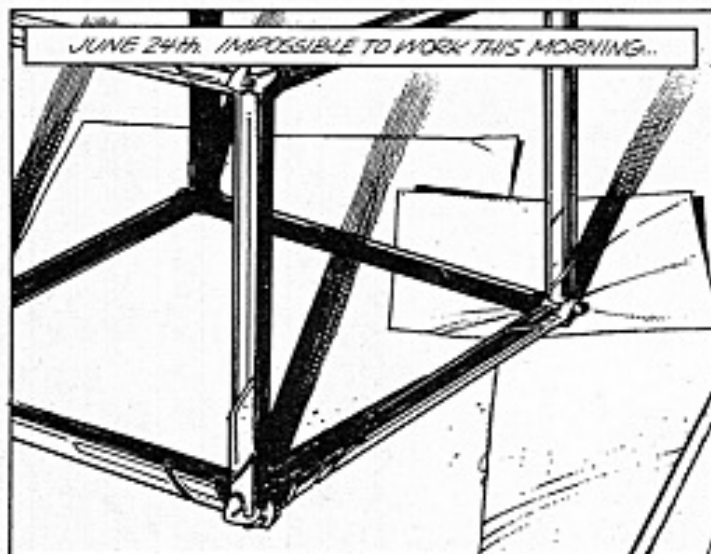
ISSUE #5 - PROMETHEVS

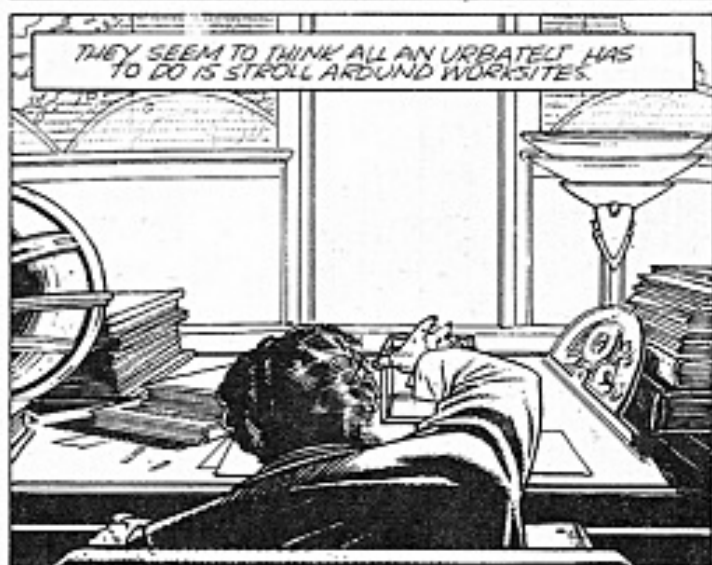
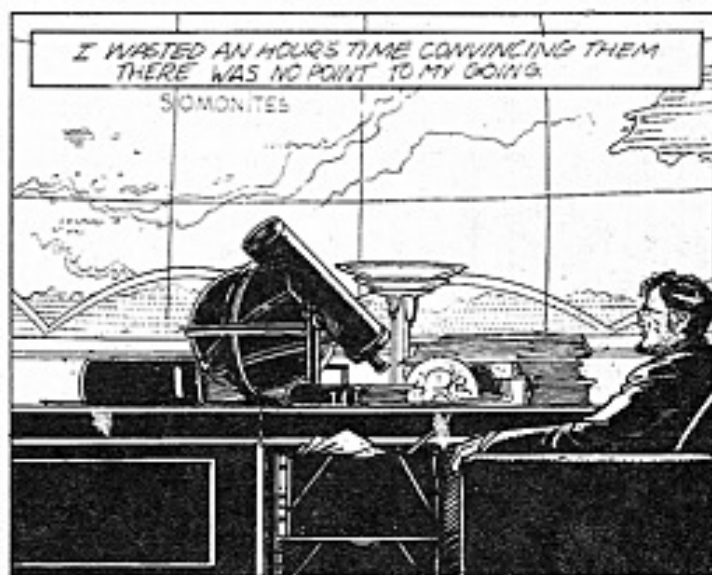
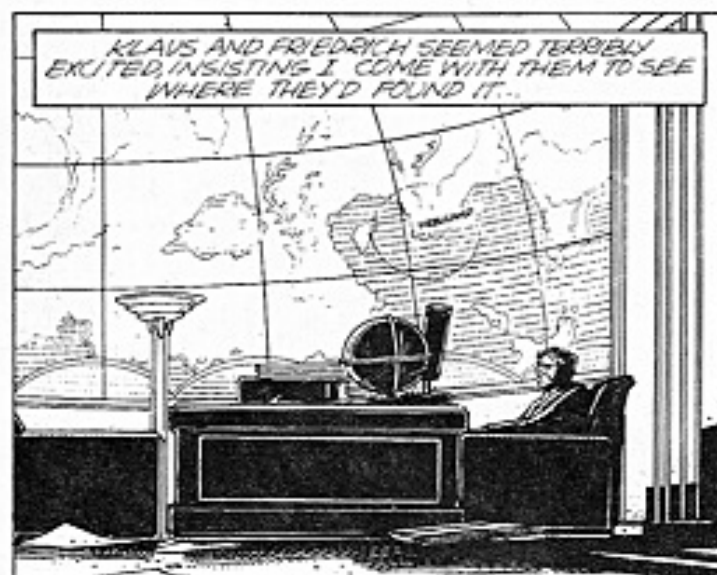
ISSUE #6 - BFY

FRENCH SCANS (FRONT PAGE, LETTER IN THE BACK): UNKNOWN

COMPILATION: NICOLAI









BUT I HAD COMPLETELY FORGOTTEN MY APPOINTMENT WITH THOMAS. THE NEWS HE BROUGHT ME DIDN'T EXACTLY IMPROVE MY MOOD.



BAD NEWS, EUGEN. THE COMMISSION VOTED AGAINST YOU. THE PLAN FOR A THIRD BRIDGE WILL PROBABLY BE TURNED DOWN.



BUT THAT'S RIDICULOUS WITH ALL THE RECENT EXTENSIONS WE NEED A NEW JUNCTION-POINT.



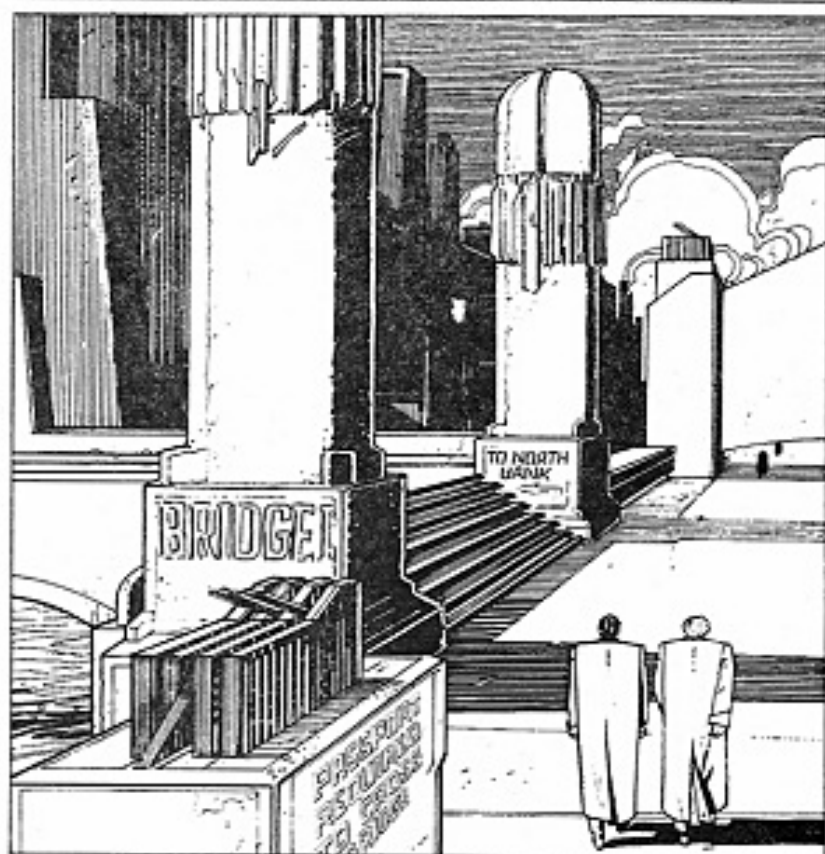
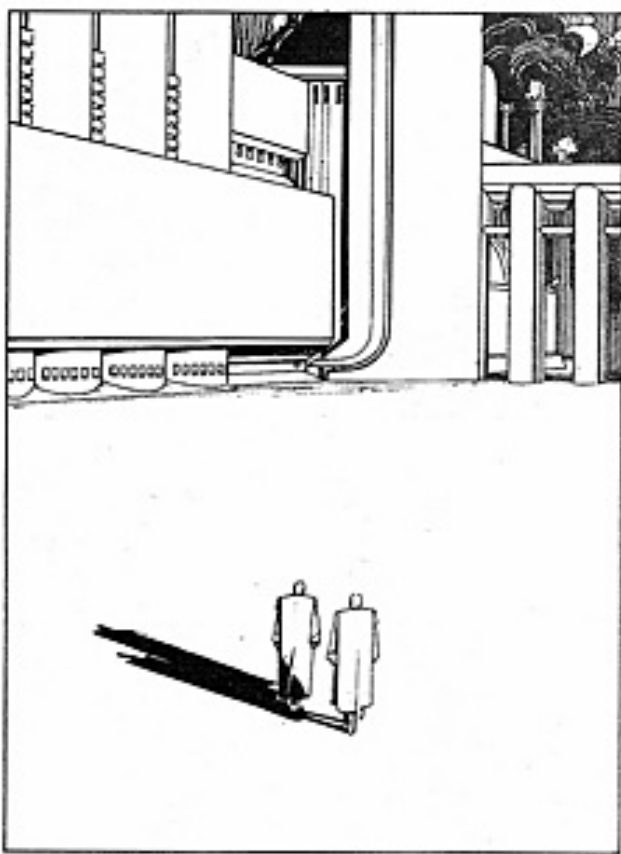
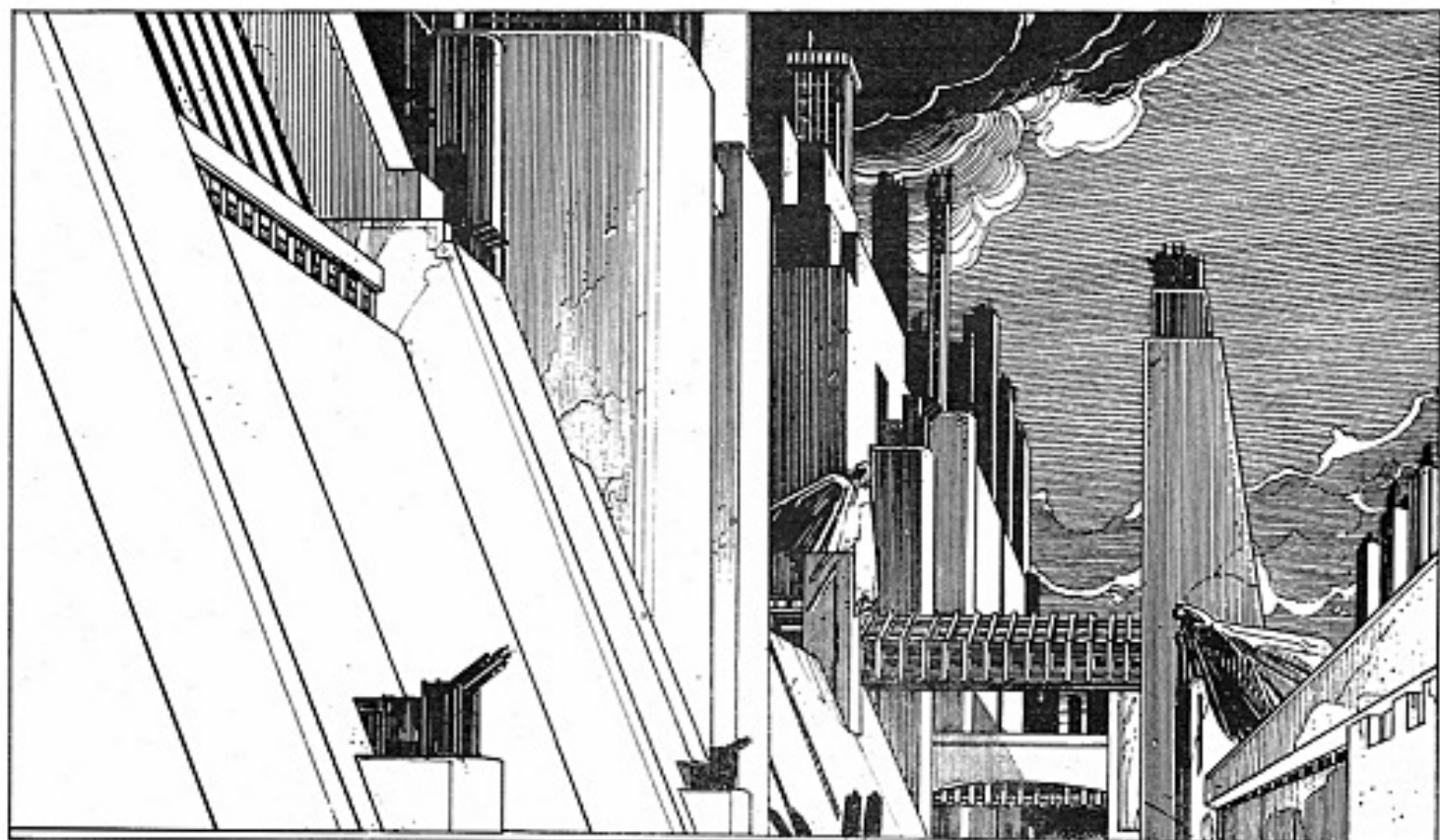
I KNOW. I THINK THEY'RE AFRAID TRAVEL BETWEEN THE NORTH BANK AND THE SOUTH BANK WILL BECOME TOO EASY.

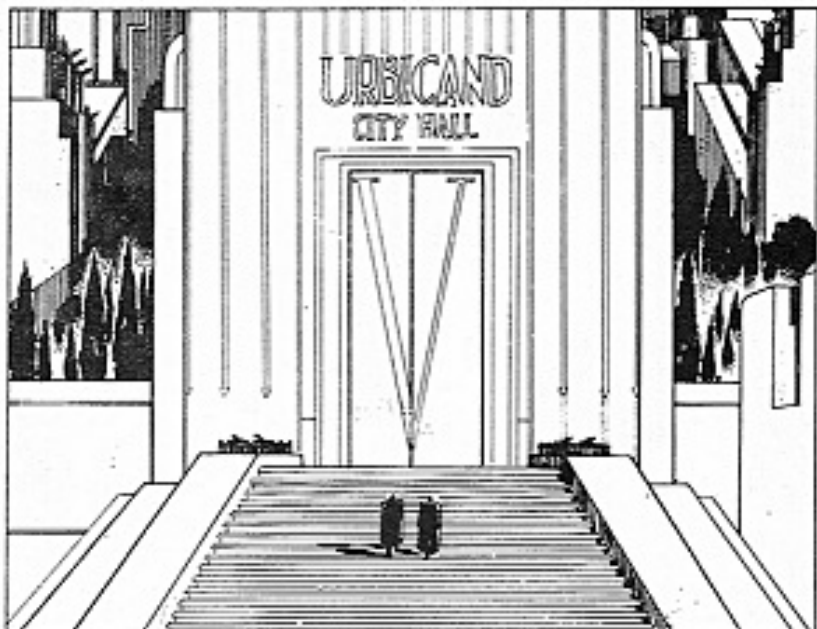
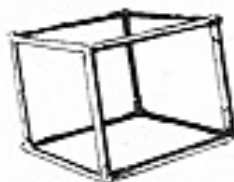


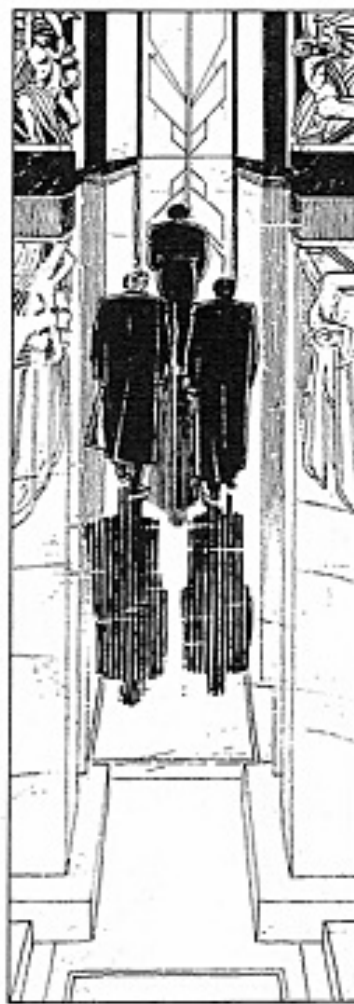
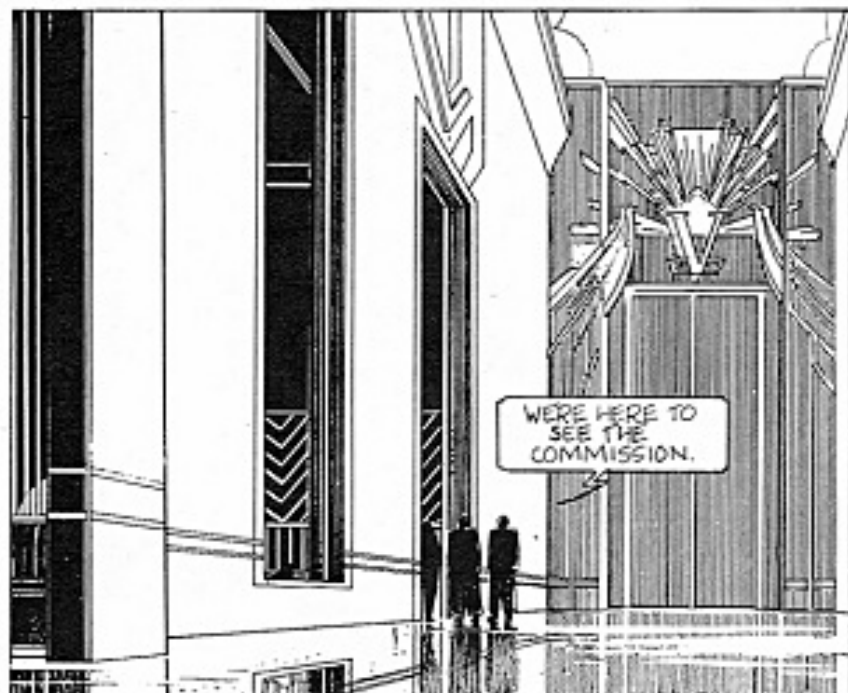
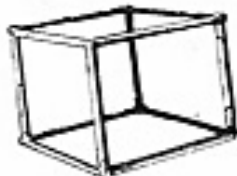
STOP PLAYING WITH THAT CUBE, WILL YOU?

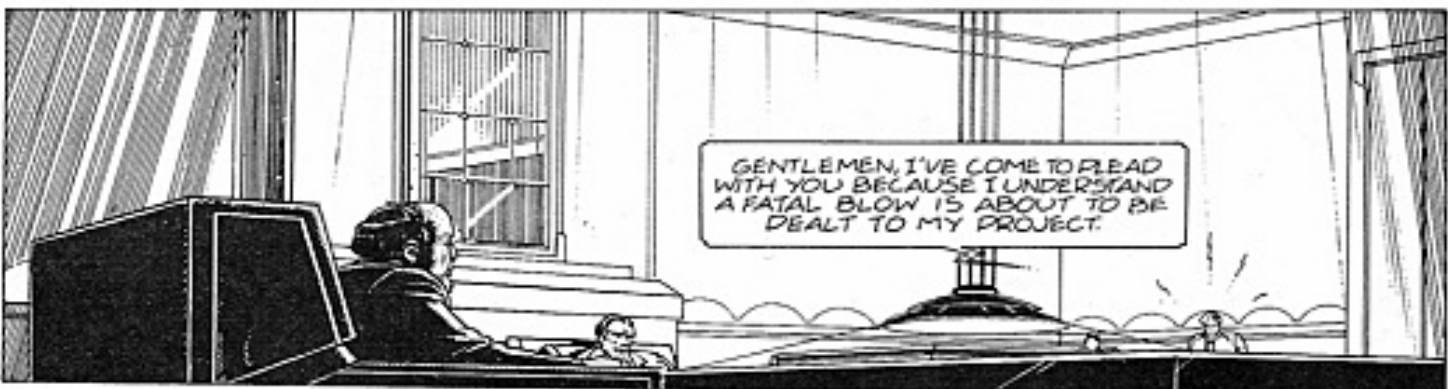
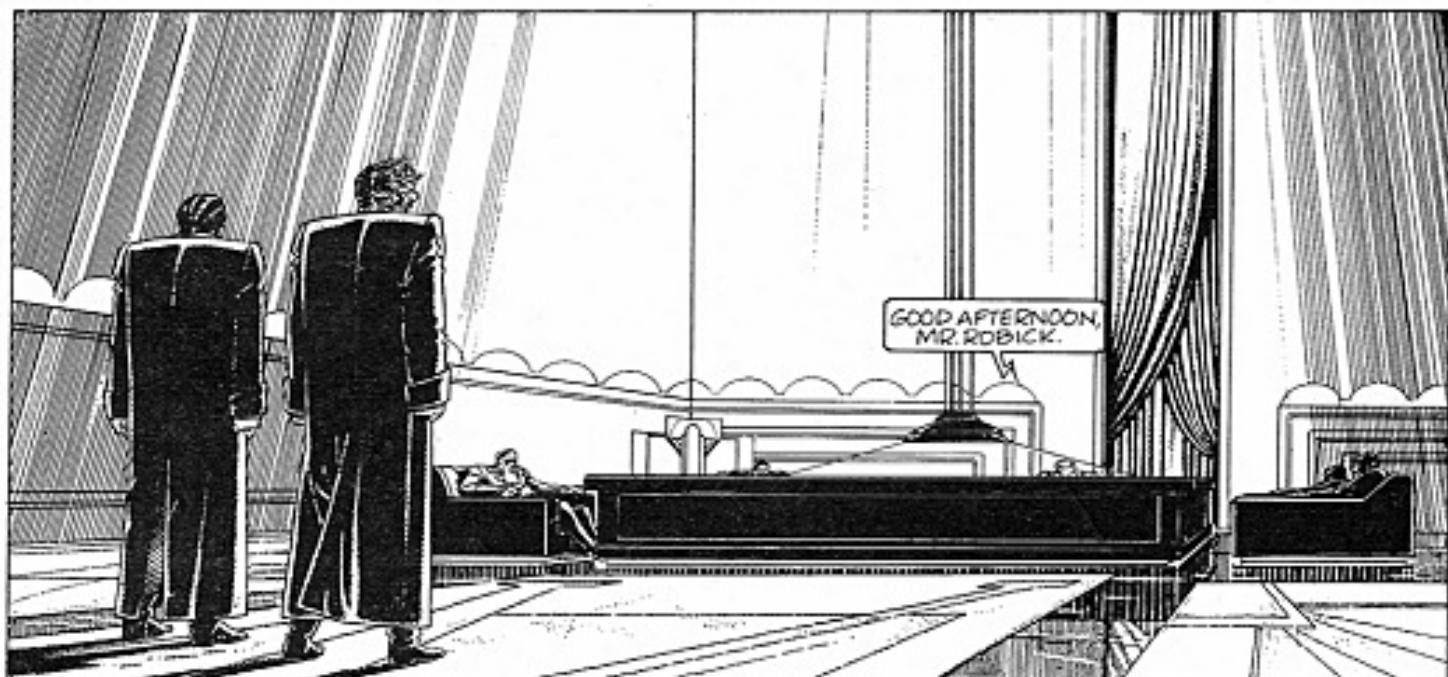
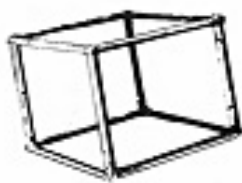


DON'T BE SO TOUCHY, EUGEN! COME, WE'LL GO BEFORE THE COMMISSION TOGETHER. PERHAPS YOU CAN CONVINCE THEM IN PERSON.



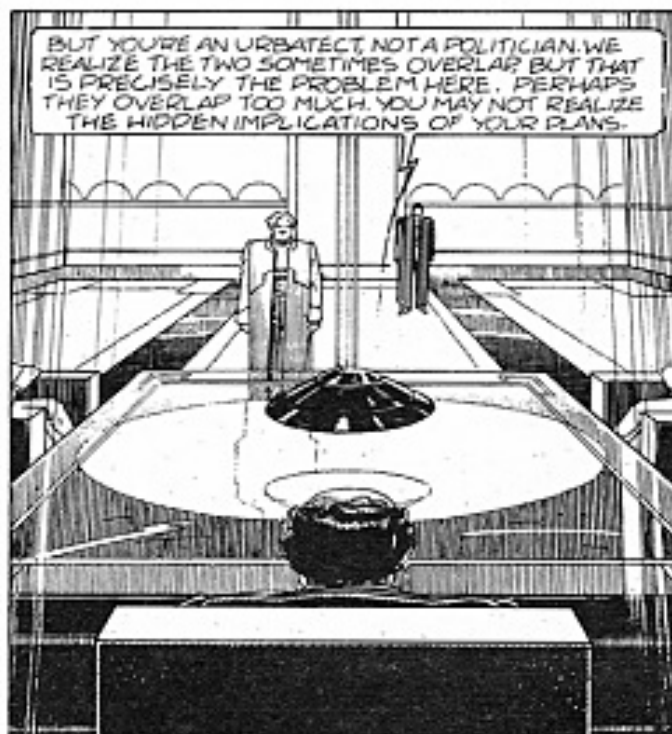








THIS VERY BUILDING, THE MOST PRESTIGIOUS PROJECT OF THE WHOLE DECADE, IS YOUR OWN WORK.



BUT YOU'RE AN URBATECT, NOT A POLITICIAN. WE REALIZE THE TWO SOMETIMES OVERLAP BUT THAT IS PRECISELY THE PROBLEM HERE. PERHAPS THEY OVERLAP TOO MUCH. YOU MAY NOT REALIZE THE HIDDEN IMPLICATIONS OF YOUR PLANS.



BUT WE'VE ALWAYS PLANNED FOR THIS THIRD BRIDGE. YOU SIGNED THE PRELIMINARY STUDY YOURSELF.



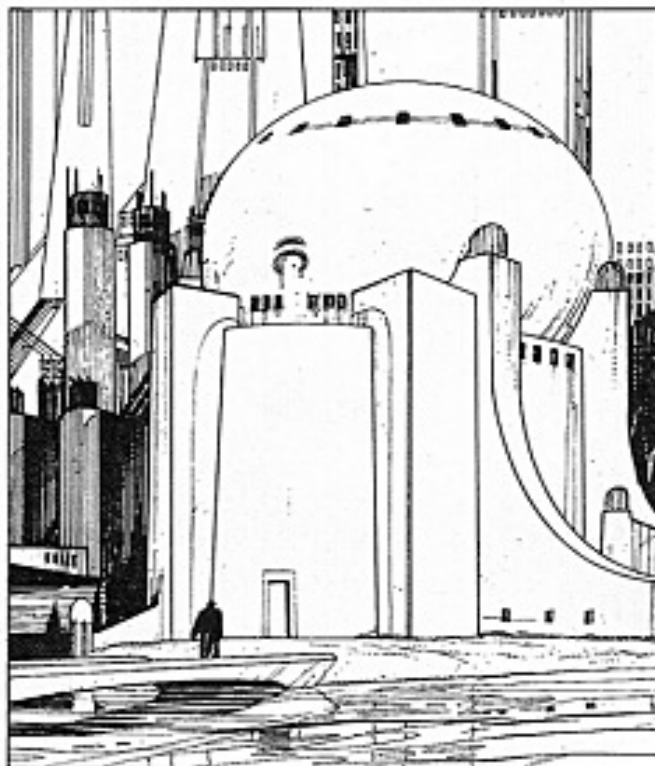
OF COURSE I DID ROBICK, BUT THE SITUATION HAS CHANGED WITH THE RECENT TROUBLES WERE BEING FORCED TO TAKE A HARDER SECOND LOOK THAT'S ALL.



BELIEVE ME, IT'S NOT MERELY A MATTER OF SYMMETRICS AND AESTHETICS. EVERY NEW BRIDGE MEANS ANOTHER POSSIBLE BREACH AND CALLS FOR TIGHTER SECURITY. WE CAN'T TAKE THAT RISK.



THERE WAS NOTHING ELSE I COULD SAY I TOLD THOMAS I WANTED TO BE ALONE AND TOOK A LONG WALK BEFORE I WENT BACK. I HAD TO FIND ANOTHER WAY TO COMPLETE THE PROJECT.



BY THE TIME I GOT BACK,
I WAS TOO TIRED TO
WORK ANYMORE.



CONFRONTATIONS ALWAYS
HAVE THE SAME EFFECT ON
ME -- ROBBERING ME OF MY
CONCENTRATION.



IN SPITE OF MYSELF, MY EYES
KEPT RETURNING TO THE CUBE.



I HAD NOT PREVIOUSLY NOTICED THE
TINY BUD-LIKE POINTS WHICH PROJECTED
FROM EACH OF THE CUBE'S
EXTREMITIES.



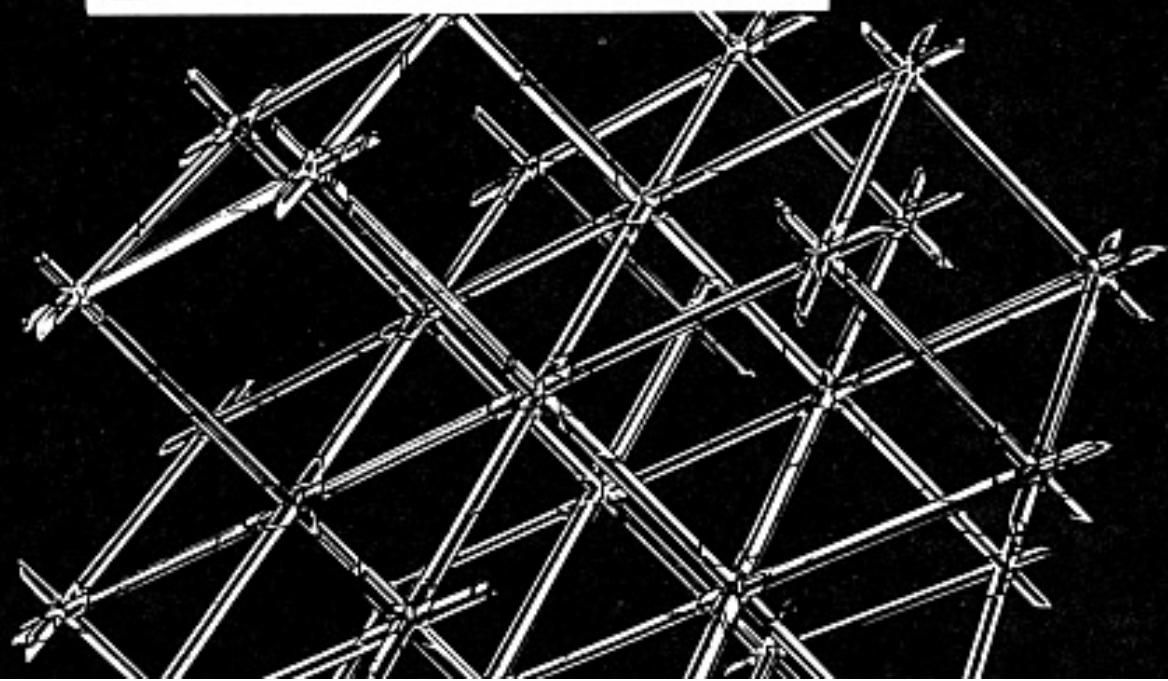
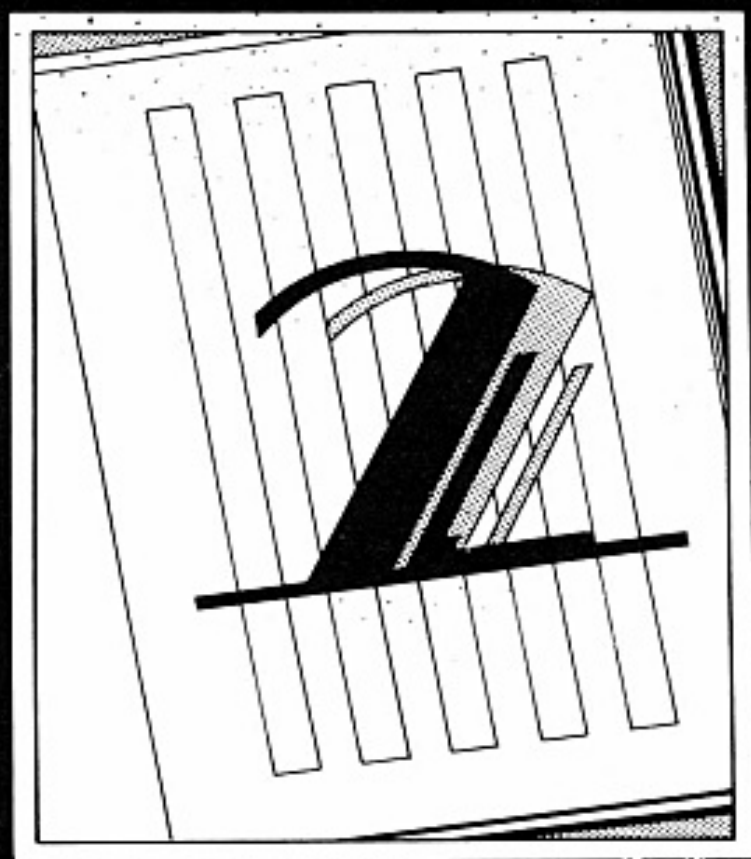
Each of the exposed
extremities I feel
like I've got nothing
more about this every-
ing. Better go to bed
and hope tomorrow
will be better.



TO BE CONTINUED...

FEVER IN URBICAND

BY
SCHUITEN & PEETERS





— JUNE 25, 9:50AM —



I WAS NOT MISTAKEN
LAST NIGHT. THE CUBE
WAS INDEED GROWING.



IT'S GROWTH IS EVEN
MORE PRONOUNCED THIS
MORNING. THERE WAS NO
LONGER THE SLIGHTEST DOUBT.



THE STRANGEST THING IS THAT THE
CUBE HAD SOMEHOW EMBEDDED
ITSELF INTO THE TABLE AND BOOK
ON WHICH I'D LEFT IT RESTING.

ALL THE SAME,
THERE'S GOT TO BE
A WAY TO GET IT OUT.



MAYBE THIS
WILL DO IT.





DAMN!
NOW, I'M
BLEEDING!

EVERY ATTEMPT TO DISLODGE IT HAS
PROVEN FUTILE. I'VE ONLY SUCCEEDED
IN HURTING MYSELF.



IT'S BECOMING APPARENT THAT THERE'S SOMETHING
ABSOLUTELY UNPRECEDENTED GOING ON HERE. I'M
EXTREMELY CURIOUS TO OBSERVE IT'S DEVELOPMENT.



5 PM, THE SAME DAY.
I HAVE BUT A MOMENT TO WRITE,
AND YET SO MUCH TO REPORT.



I HOPE
HE'S HOME.

I WANTED TO REMAIN AND OBSERVE THE CUBE THIS
MORNING BUT I NEEDED TO MEET WITH THOMAS
TO SHARE MY THOUGHTS REGARDING THE THIRD BRIDGE...



I HAD COME UP WITH A NUMBER OF
NEW OPTIONS THE PREVIOUS NIGHT AND
WONDERED WHAT HE'D THINK OF THEM...



NOT FOR ONE MOMENT DID I
IMAGINE THE TURN THAT
THINGS WERE ABOUT TO TAKE.



AH, IT'S YOU! COME IN!



I GAVE A LOT OF THOUGHT TO THIS MATTER LAST NIGHT, THOMAS, AND I THINK I'VE COME UP WITH A FEW INTERESTING IDEAS.



HAVE YOU? GOOD! SIT DOWN! BUT WHAT HAPPENED? DID YOU HURT YOURSELF?



THAT? OH, IT'S NOTHING... A MINOR CUT, THAT'S ALL. I GOT IT FROM THAT CUBE YOU SAW ON MY DESK YESTERDAY. IT GREW LARGER DURING THE NIGHT.

GREW LARGER? WHAT DO YOU MEAN?



WELL, FIRST IT SPROUTED BUDS ON EACH OF THE CORNERS, JUST LIKE A PLANT, THEN NEW BRANCHES STARTED TO GROW AND DEVELOP...



THE MOST AMAZING THING IS THE CUBE HAS FIRMLY EMBEDDED ITSELF INTO MY DESK. YET IT HAS NOT BECOME A PART OF IT. IT'S AS THOUGH IT WAS TRANSPARENT, PERHAPS MORE ACCURATELY, "INDIFFERENT" TO EXTERNAL MATTER, YET ITS QUITE FIRMLY ANCHORED-- I HURT MY HANDS TRYING TO MOVE IT.



AND YOU'VE WAITED TILL NOW TO TELL ME THIS! IF I HADN'T MENTIONED IT MYSELF YOU WOULDN'T HAVE SAID A WORD ABOUT IT! UNBELIEVABLE! INCREDIBLE!



I DON'T THINK YOU FULLY REALIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF WHAT YOU'RE SAYING, EUGEN. YOU TALK OF THIS AS THOUGH IT WERE SOME KIND OF COMMON OCCURRENCE. IT'S AS THOUGH YOU FOUND A BUDDING CUBE ON YOUR DESK EVERY DAY.



COME ON! GET YOUR COAT! LET'S GO BACK TO YOUR OFFICE AT ONCE. I WANT TO SEE THIS WITH MY OWN EYES.

VERY WELL, AS YOU WISH.





YOU KNOW, THOMAS, I'VE GIVEN A GREAT DEAL OF THOUGHT TO THIS MATTER OF A THIRD BRIDGE. THE SOLUTION I ENVISION IS...

LATER, EUGEN. LATER. RIGHT NOW, NOTHING MATTERS BUT THAT CUBE.

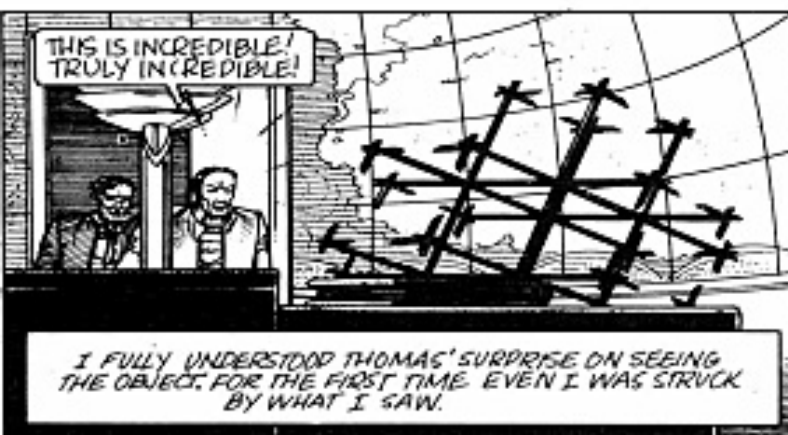
IT'S STRANGE, BUT FROM THE FIRST MOMENT I SAW IT I FELT THERE WAS SOMETHING UNUSUAL ABOUT IT.

REMEMBER, I COULDN'T STOP PLAYING WITH IT. YOU YOURSELF ASKED ME TO STOP. PERHAPS IT WAS THE MATERIAL THAT INTRIGUED ME, IT HAD THE COLDNESS OF METAL WITHOUT HAVING ITS WEIGHT AND TEXTURE.

I CAN'T WAIT TO TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT IT.

WHERE DID I PUT MY KEYS? AH! HERE THEY ARE!

!?





AS SOON AS HE LEFT I SANK
BACK INTO CONTEMPLATION.



THE CUBE WAS GROWING RIGHT THROUGH MY DESK AND SOME OF ITS BRANCHES WERE COMING OUT THE OTHER SIDE. IT SEEMED TO BE DEVELOPING SYMMETRICALLY AND EACH NEW CUBE PATTERN WAS THE SAME SIZE AS THE LAST.



ANOTHER CURIOUS THING WAS THAT THE INITIAL CUBE WAS EXPANDING AS NEW BRANCHES GREW OUT FROM IT. IT WOULDN'T BE HARD TO CALCULATE THE GROWTH RATE, BUT I KNEW AT A GLANCE THAT IT WOULD BE ASTONISHING.



IF THIS STRANGE ARTIFACT CONTINUED TO GROW AT THIS RATE, WHICH SEEMED LIKELY GIVEN ITS REGULARITY SO FAR, THE CONSEQUENCES WOULD BE ENORMOUS.



June 24 morning
slides, approx 12m
branches, none
June 29 9-10am
slides, approx 20m
branches, none
June 29 11-12
slides





THE MOST RECENT LATERAL BRANCHES HAVE BEEN GROWING RAPIDLY. I WAS SO ABSORBED IN MY FIGURES I HADN'T NOTICED THAT THEY WOULD SOON MEET IN THE MIDDLE.

EUGEN!

IT WAS INCREDIBLE. THE COMMISSION MADE ME WAIT FOR TWO HOURS AND THEN THEY DIDN'T WANT TO HEAR ABOUT IT. THEY ACTED AS IF IT WERE SOME KIND OF PRACTICAL JOKE!

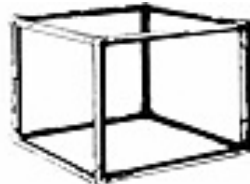
THEY'RE CONVINCED IT'S JUST SOME SCHEME TO CALL ATTENTION TO YOURSELF AND STIR UP TALK ABOUT THE THIRD BRIDGE. MY PROTESTS DID NO GOOD.

IT DOESN'T MATTER, THOMAS! DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT! THEY'LL SEE THE EVIDENCE AND REALIZE THEIR ERROR SOON ENOUGH.

LOOK AT THIS, THOMAS! ISN'T IT AWESOME?

THEY'RE MERGING PERFECTLY!

WHAT ARE ALL THESE PAPERS, ALL THESE FIGURES?



I'VE ATTEMPTED TO CALCULATE THE PHENOMENON'S DEVELOPMENT. OF COURSE I CAN'T BE TOTALLY EXACT, BUT I DON'T THINK I'M FAR OFF.

IN ANY EVENT, THE RESULTS ARE QUITE AMAZING.

AND TO THINK-- THE PHENOMENON BEGAN RIGHT HERE! I'LL GIVE IT MY NAME. I'LL CALL IT ROBICK'S CUBE-- NO NETWORK... YES, THAT'S IT! ROBICK'S NETWORK.

DO YOU REALIZE THE MEANING OF THIS, THOMAS? IT'S ASTOUNDING!

YOU'RE RAVING, EUGEN... COME ALONG, YOU SHOULDN'T STAY HERE. YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN! YOU CAN STAY AT MY HOUSE FOR AS LONG AS YOU WISH.

NO, I'D RATHER STAY AND OBSERVE THIS. COME, THOMAS, HAVE A DRINK WITH ME! WE MUST TOAST THIS OCCASION.

TO BE CONTINUED...

FEVER IN URBICAND

BY

SCHUITEN & PEETERS

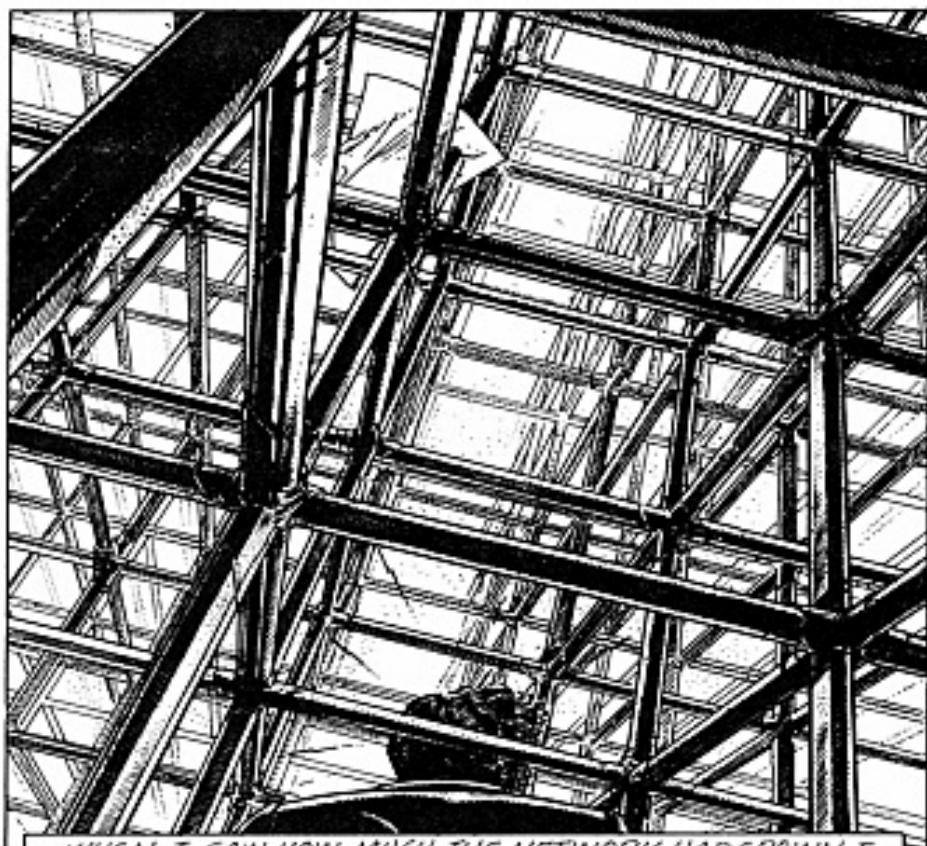




JUNE 26...



I AWOKE WITH A VIOLENT HEADACHE. I MUST HAVE HAD TOO MUCH TO DRINK THE NIGHT BEFORE.



WHEN I SAW HOW MUCH THE NETWORK HAD GROWN I THOUGHT I WAS STILL DREAMING. IT TOOK UP ALMOST THE ENTIRE ROOM, IMPRISONING ME IN ITS CROSSBARS.



ONE OF THE CROSSBARS HAD PASSED RIGHT THROUGH MY ARM; I COULDN'T MOVE IT AT ALL.

WHAT AM I GOING TO DO? GOOD LORD! WHAT AM I GOING TO DO?



STRANGELY ENOUGH I FELT NO PAIN, BUT I KNEW IF I TRIED TO FREE MYSELF I WOULD INJURE MY ARM BADLY.

I HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO BE PATIENT. I WAITED FOR OVER THREE HOURS. AT LAST THE NETWORK GROWTH FREED MY ARM.





FINALLY!



BUT MY TROUBLES WEREN'T OVER. THE ROOM WAS ALMOST COMPLETELY FILLED...



AND YET I MANAGED TO ESCAPE.

I SHOULD BE ABLE TO GET OUT UP HERE...



THERE ISN'T MUCH TIME!



BARELY!



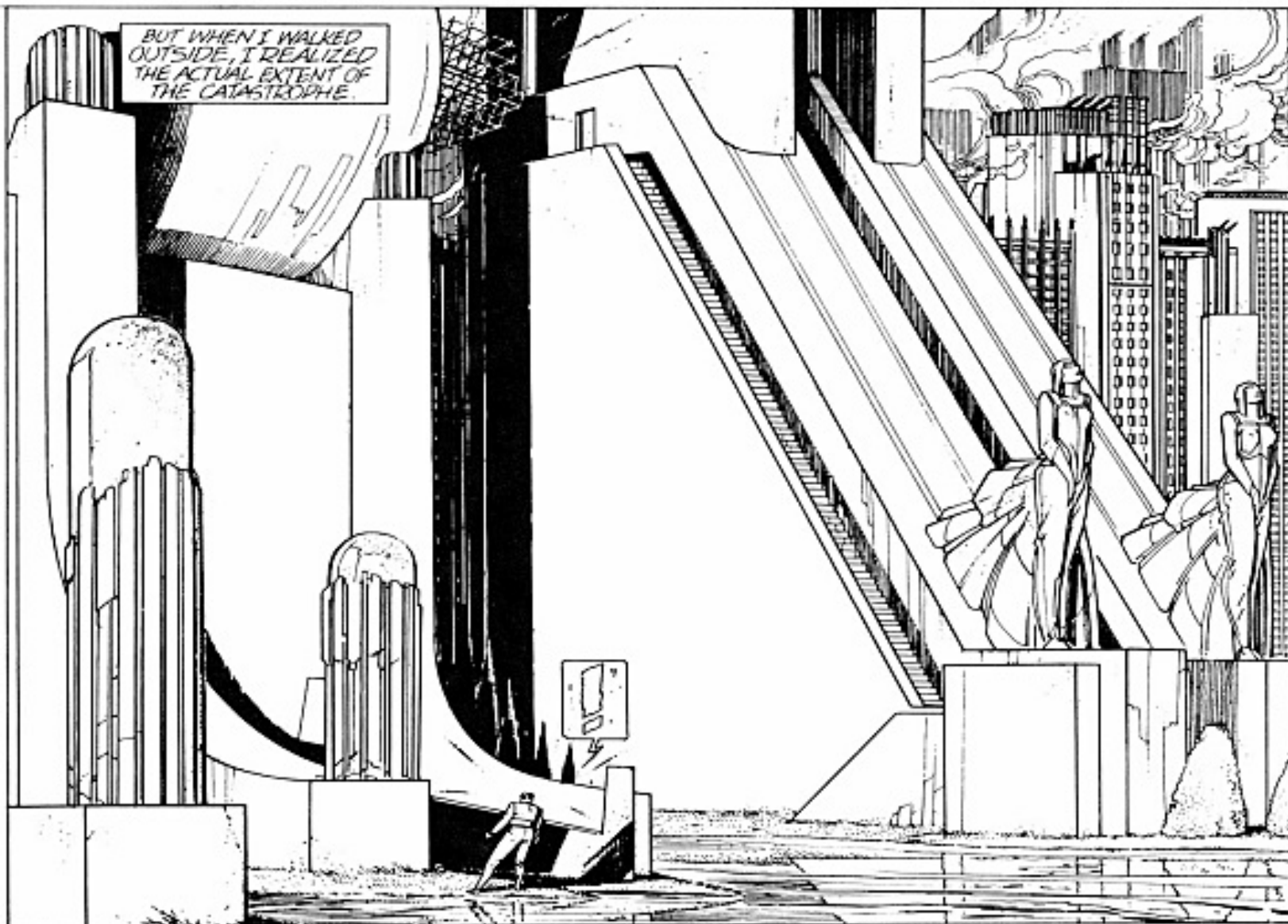
I REALIZED THAT THOMAS HAD BEEN RIGHT ALL ALONG.

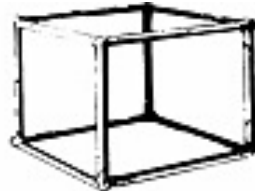


I HAD TO WARN HIM IMMEDIATELY, AND ASK HIM WHAT WE SHOULD DO NEXT.

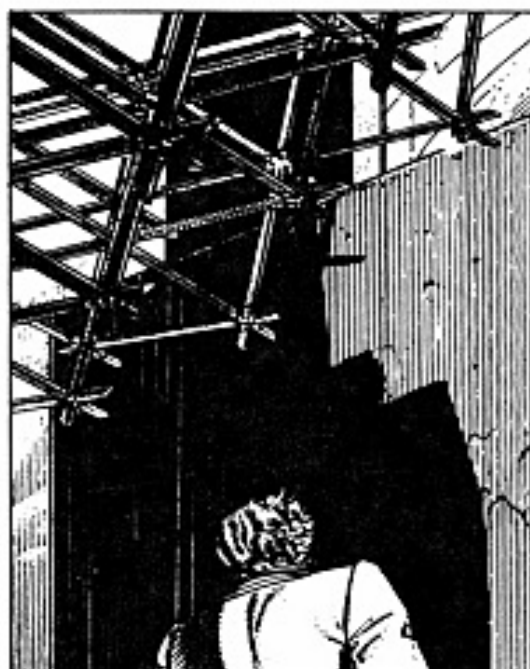


BUT WHEN I WALKED OUTSIDE, I REALIZED THE ACTUAL EXTENT OF THE CATASTROPHE.





THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR HAD BEEN
CONTAMINATED. CONSUMED WITH
CURIOSITY, I HEADED STRAIGHT FOR IT.



FOR ONCE THE NETWORK WAS
OF USE TO ME!



CONGRATULATIONS,
MR. ROBICK!





WHO ARE YOU? WHAT DO YOU WANT? AND HOW DO YOU KNOW MY NAME?



KNOW YOUR NAME? WHY, WE'RE NEIGHBORS! YOU'VE NEVER COME OVER TO MY HOUSE BEFORE, SO THIS MUST BE A VERY SPECIAL OCCASION!



SO NOW YOU'VE BEGUN TO EXPORT YOUR INVENTIONS, AND TO MY HOUSE TOO!



I ASSURE YOU, MADAM, I HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH THE PHENOMENON THAT HAS STRUCK YOUR ESTABLISHMENT. I AM BUT A HELPLESS WITNESS.

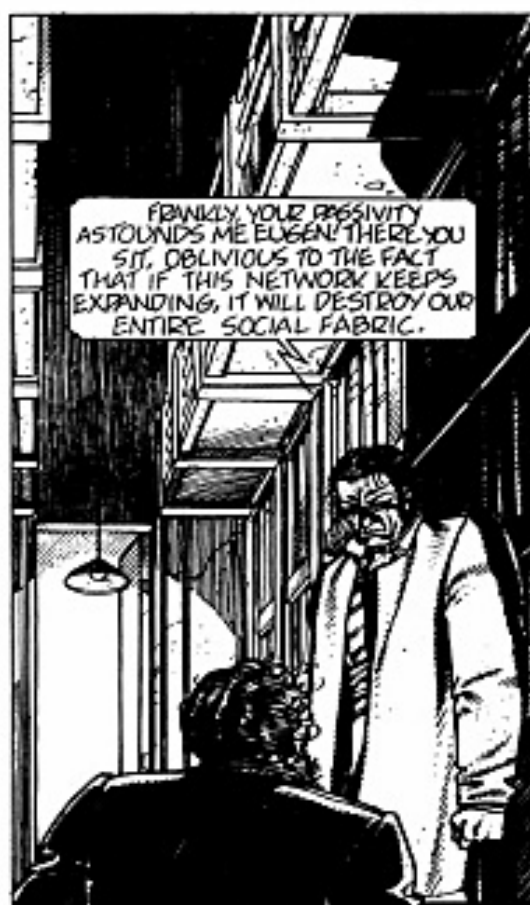


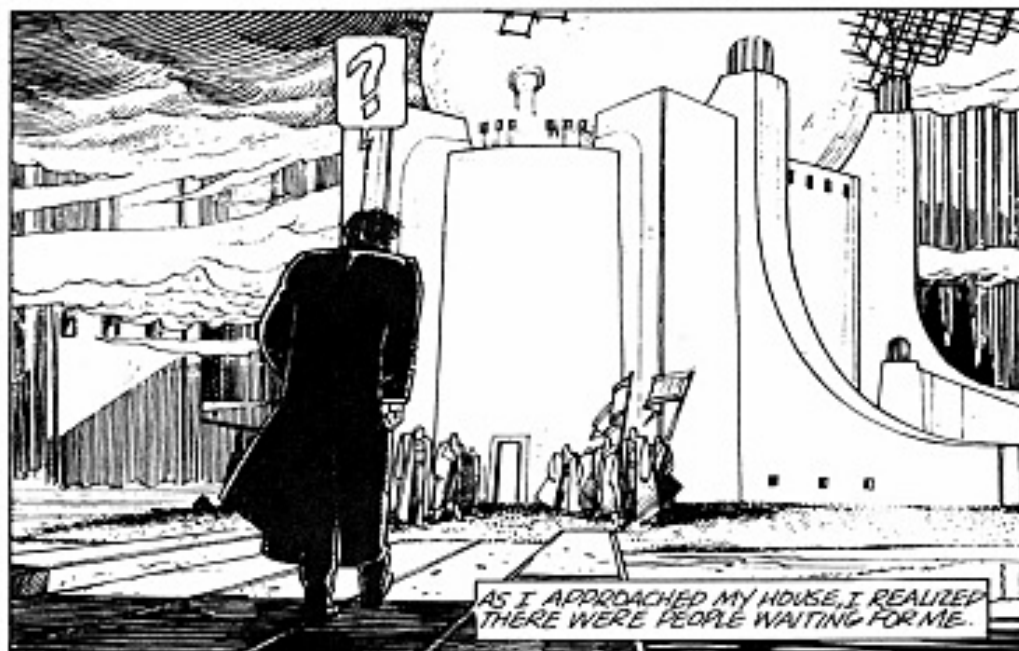
COME NOW, DON'T BE SO MODEST! I'VE SEEN YOU COME HOME, YOUR HEAD LOST IN THOUGHT, AND I'VE ALWAYS SAID TO MYSELF: THAT MAN IS THE GENIUS WHO DESIGNED ALL THESE STRUCTURES WE LIVE IN!



BUT NOW AFTER HAVING SEEN YOUR LATEST INVENTION, I REALIZE YOU'RE MUCH MORE THAN THAT: YOU'RE AN ARTIST, A POET. IT'S SUCH A PLEASURE TO TALK TO YOU!









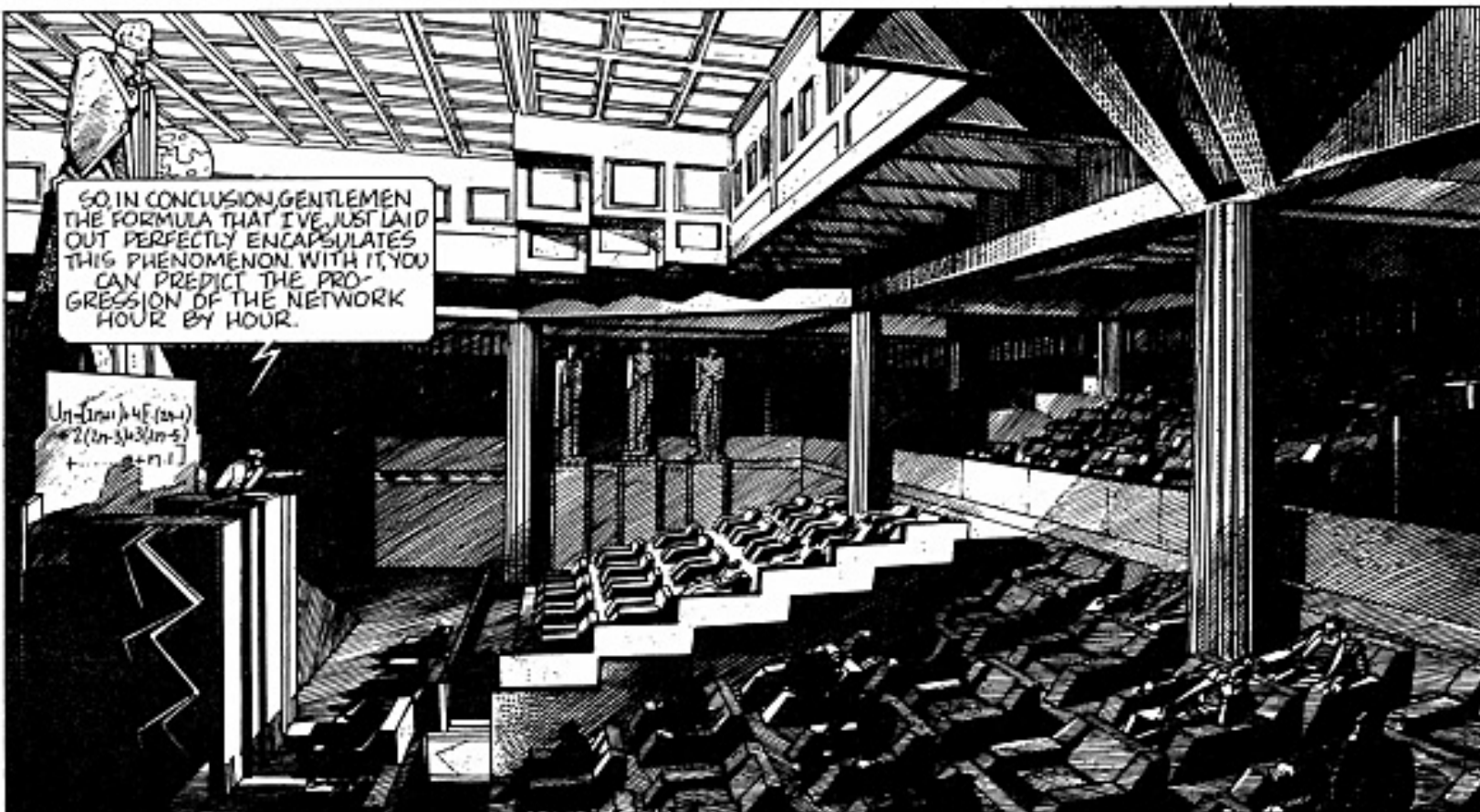
AH, THERE YOU ARE, ROBICK!
WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR QUITE
SOME TIME. THE COMMISSION
WOULD LIKE AN EXPLANATION
OF YOUR LATEST INVENTION...



THIS IS A SCIENTIFIC PROBLEM,
GENTLEMEN. I WILL PRESENT MY
CONCLUSIONS TO THE ACADEMY ONLY!



EVENTUALLY THEY AGREED TO FOLLOW
ME TO THE ACADEMY AND AN EXTRA-
ORDINARY SESSION WAS HASTILY ARRANGED



SO, IN CONCLUSION, GENTLEMEN,
THE FORMULA THAT I'VE JUST LAID
OUT PERFECTLY ENCAPSULATES
THIS PHENOMENON WITH IT, YOU
CAN PREDICT THE PRO-
GRESSION OF THE NETWORK
HOUR BY HOUR.

$$U_1 - (1m) / 4E (2m) \\ + 2(2m - 3m) / 5 \\ + \dots + n / 1$$



THE DISCUSSION THAT FOLLOWED SEEMED TO LAST FOREVER... I'D NEVER IMAGINED HOW INCOMPETENT THE COMMISSION, EVEN THE RECORDER, COULD BE.

AT U3, THERE WERE ONLY 68 CUBES. AT U5 THERE WERE 231. AT U8, WE STAND AT 833... BY U10, WHICH SHOULD BE REACHED TOMORROW MORNING, THEY'LL TOTAL 1561.

YOU CAN IMAGINE WHAT U20, U30 OR U50 WILL BE LIKE... IF THE PROGRESSION CONTINUES AT THE SAME RATE, EACH OF THE BRANCHES WILL BE SEVERAL METERS LONG.

THIS IS ABSURD! THIS MAN DOESN'T KNOW WHAT HE'S SAYING!

WHO DOES HE THINK HE IS? WHAT MAKES HIM SO SURE ABOUT ALL THIS?

...AND WHAT IS THIS CUBE MADE OF, ROBICK? SINCE YOU KNOW SO MUCH, TELL US THAT!!

EXCELLENT QUESTION!

AS INCREDIBLE AS IT SEEMS, I AM FORCED TO HYPOTHEZIZE THAT WE'RE DEALING WITH SOME SELF-GENERATING... MATERIAL...

AHAHAHA!

THIS MAN IS A FRAUD!

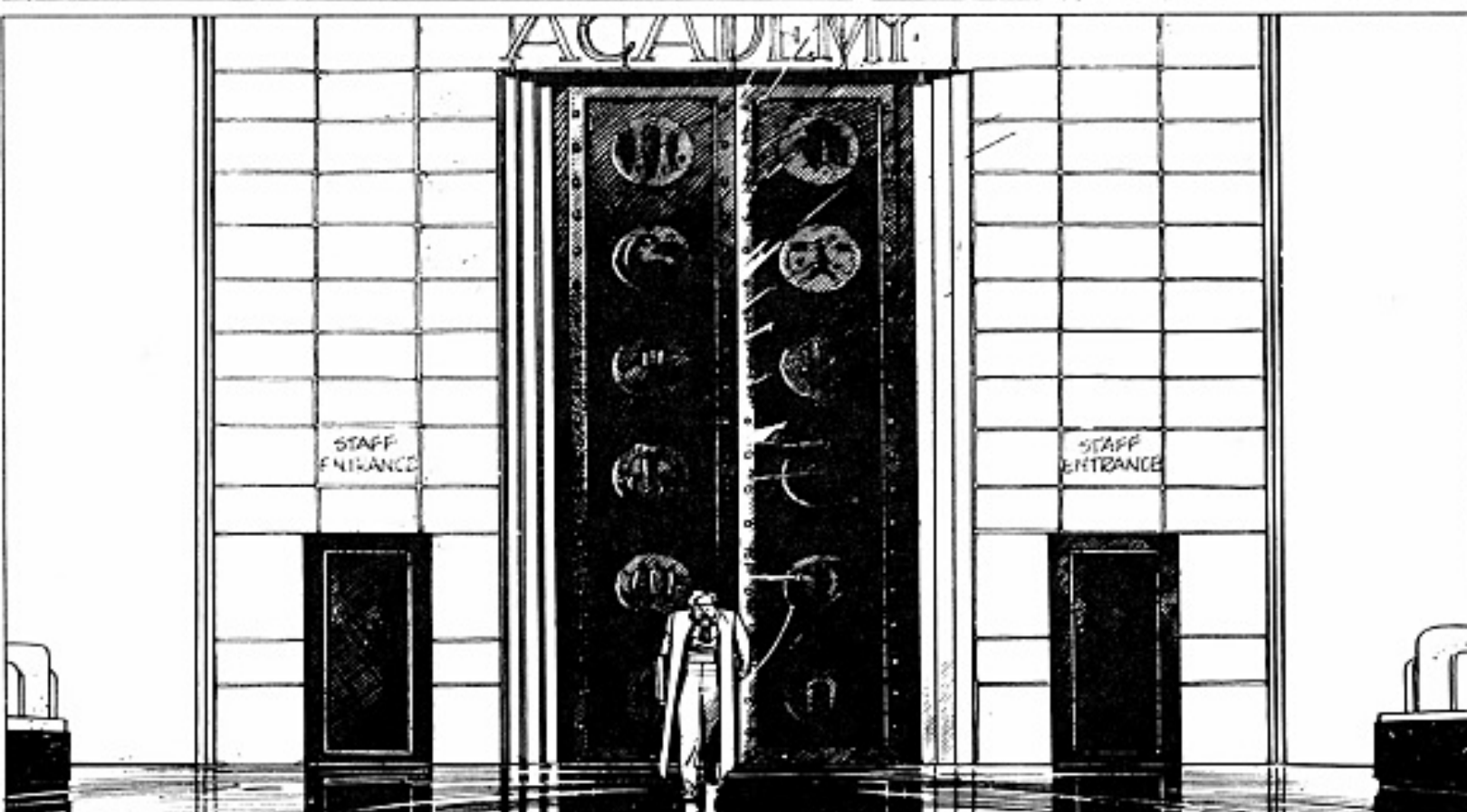
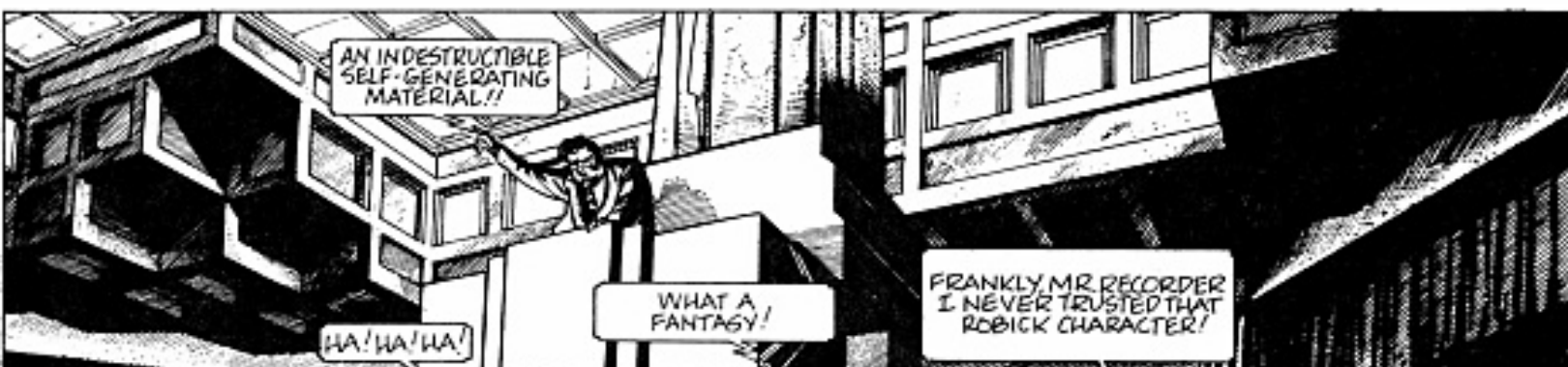
THIS IS DISGRACEFUL!

SCANDALOUS!

HOW DARE HE / IN THE ACADEMY!

INCREDIBLE, TOTALLY INCREDIBLE!

PRaise THE RECORDER FOR EXPOSING THIS IMPOSTOR!

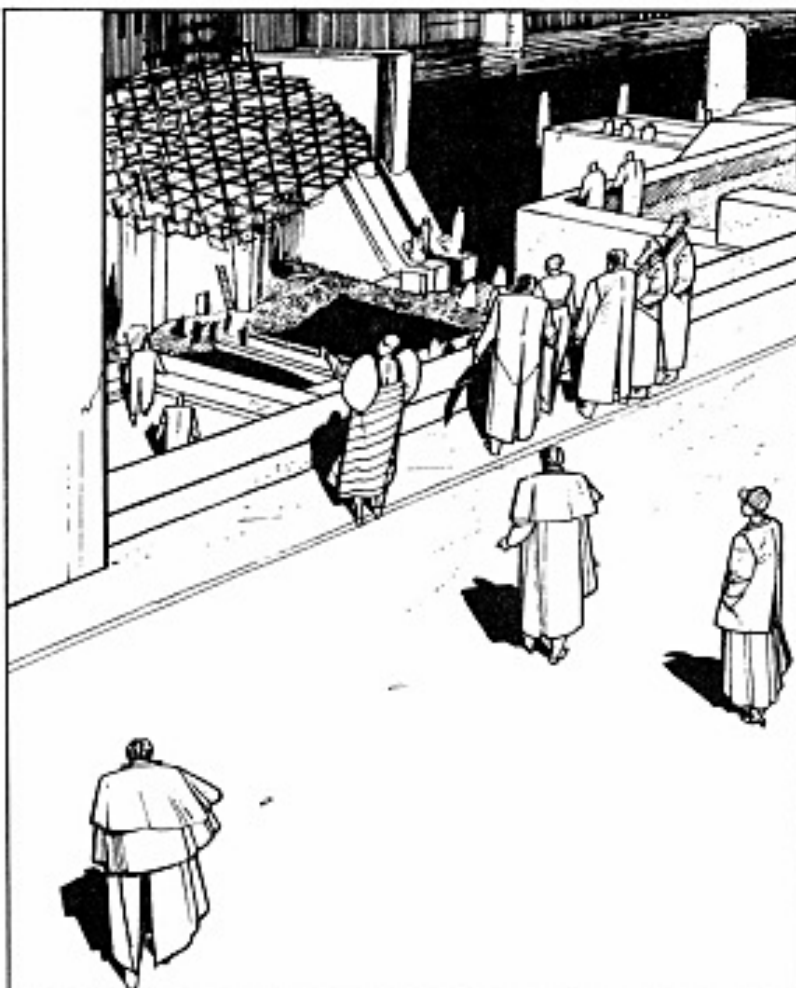




JUNE 28
THEY SENT A TEAM OF WORKMEN TO
TRY TO STOP THE NETWORKS EXPA-
SION. I TOLD THEM STRAIGHT OFF
THEY WERE WASTING THEIR
TIME AND THAT THEY'D HAVE NO
EFFECT ON IT WHATSOEVER.



THEY ONLY SUCCEEDED IN
WRECKING A DOOR AND DAMAGING
SOME FURNITURE.



THE GENERAL POPULATION APPEARS TO BE BOTH CON-
CERNED AND EXCITED. PEOPLE GATHER IN THE STREETS DE-
SPITE THE INCREASED SECURITY CHECKS. THEY SEEM TO BE
WAITING FOR SOMETHING, AS YET UNKNOWN...



OUR CITY IS UNDERGOING A
TEMPORARY CRISIS WHICH CERTAIN
ELEMENTS WOULD LIKE TO EXPLOIT
AS A MEANS OF SUBVERSION.
THIS IS A DIFFICULT SITUATION,
AND WE URGE EVERYONE TO
REMAIN CALM.



JULY 1ST
MORE AND MORE PEOPLE ARE DROPPING
BY TO ASK MY ADVICE ON ONE THING OR
ANOTHER.



I LIMIT MYSELF TO A FEW BASIC OBSERVATIONS SUCH
AS RECOMMENDING THAT THEY MAKE SURE THEY'RE
NOT IN THE LINE OF GROWTH OF ANY OF THE BRANCHES
BEFORE GOING TO SLEEP.



SEVERAL PEOPLE HAVE BEEN
IMMOBILIZED FOR HOURS. THERE
ARE RUMORS THAT SOME HAVE
SUFFOCATED OR STARVED TO DEATH BUT
OFFICIALLY, IT'S ALWAYS BEEN DENIED.



BROTHERS AND SISTERS, WE
ARE BEING PUNISHED FOR OUR
PRIDE! WE MUST REPENT AND
START DOWN THE ROAD TO
DELIVERANCE!



JULY 2
I RECEIVED A NOTE FROM SOPHIE THIS MORNING,
ASKING ME TO COME BY AND SEE HER.



DESPITE ALL I TOLD HER SHE WON'T GIVE UP THE
NOTION THAT I'M SOMEHOW RESPONSIBLE FOR THE
THE NETWORK'S EXISTENCE.

EVEN IF IT'S NOT YOUR
INVENTION, IT CAN'T BE
MERE COINCIDENCE
THAT IT STARTED ON
YOUR DESK!

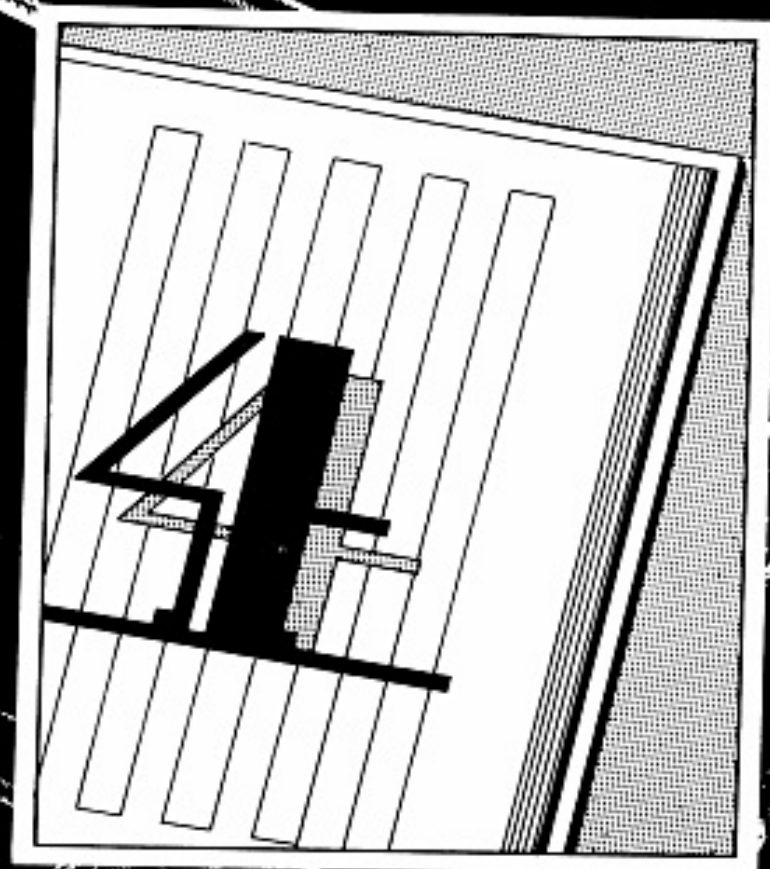




FEVER IN URBICAND

BY

SCHUITEN & PEETERS



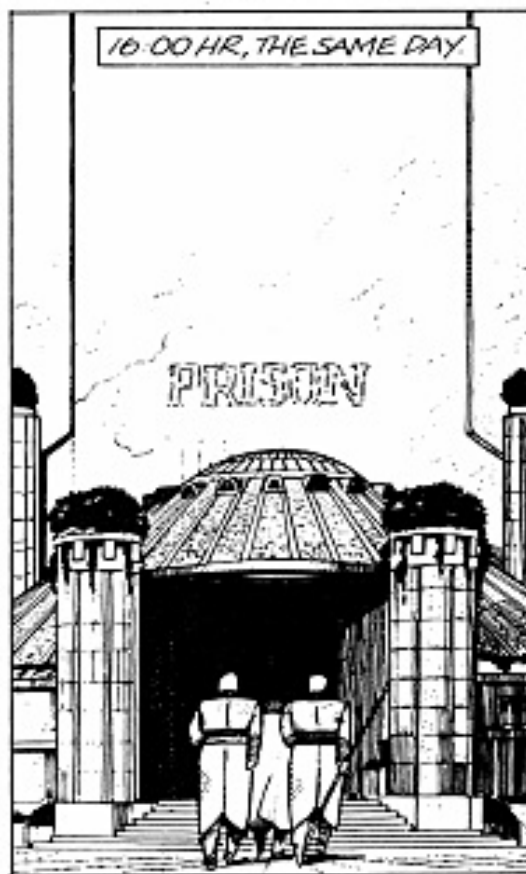


JULY 4
SOPHIE'S CAMPAIGN HAS TAKEN OFF WITH AMAZING SPEED SHE WANTS ME TO ENTER THE ELECTIONS AND BECOME ONE OF THE COMMISSIONERS.

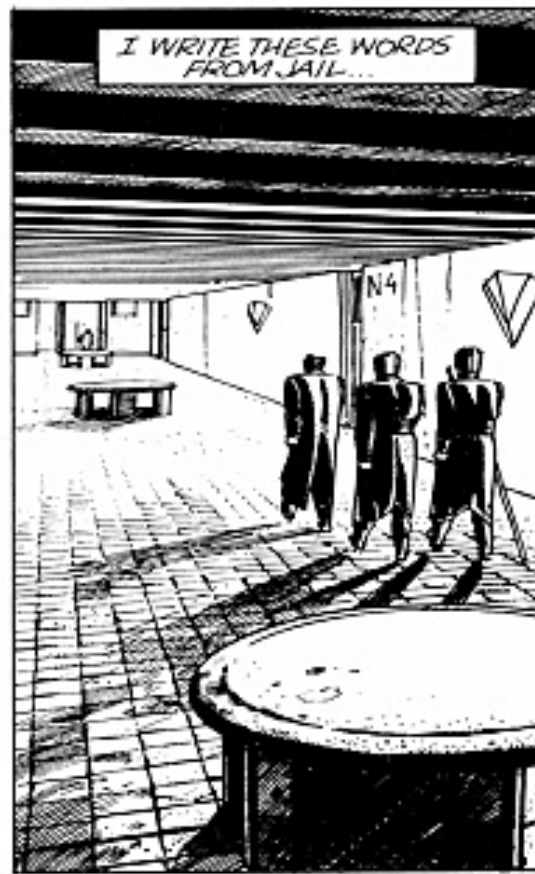
ALL THIS IS NOT TO THOMAS' LIKING. SOPHIE SAYS HE RAILS AGAINST ME WHEN EVER HE CAN. IT LOOKS AS THOUGH OUR FRIENDSHIP IS TRULY OVER.



16:00 HR, THE SAME DAY



I WRITE THESE WORDS FROM JAIL...



THEY CAME AND ARRESTED ME WITHOUT ANY EXPLANATION...



OBVIOUSLY ANOTHER OF THE COMMISSION'S INSANE ACTS...



JULY 5.



ARMED SOLDIERS PATROL THE STREETS AS IF WE WERE ON THE BRINK OF WAR.



JULY 7.



THE NETWORK NOW COVERS THE ENTIRE SOUTHEASTERN SECTOR OF THE CITY. SOON, IT WILL CREATE COUNTLESS ILLEGAL CROSSING POINTS BETWEEN THE TWO BANKS. EVEN WITH STEPPED-UP POLICE SECURITY THEY WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO WATCH THEM ALL.

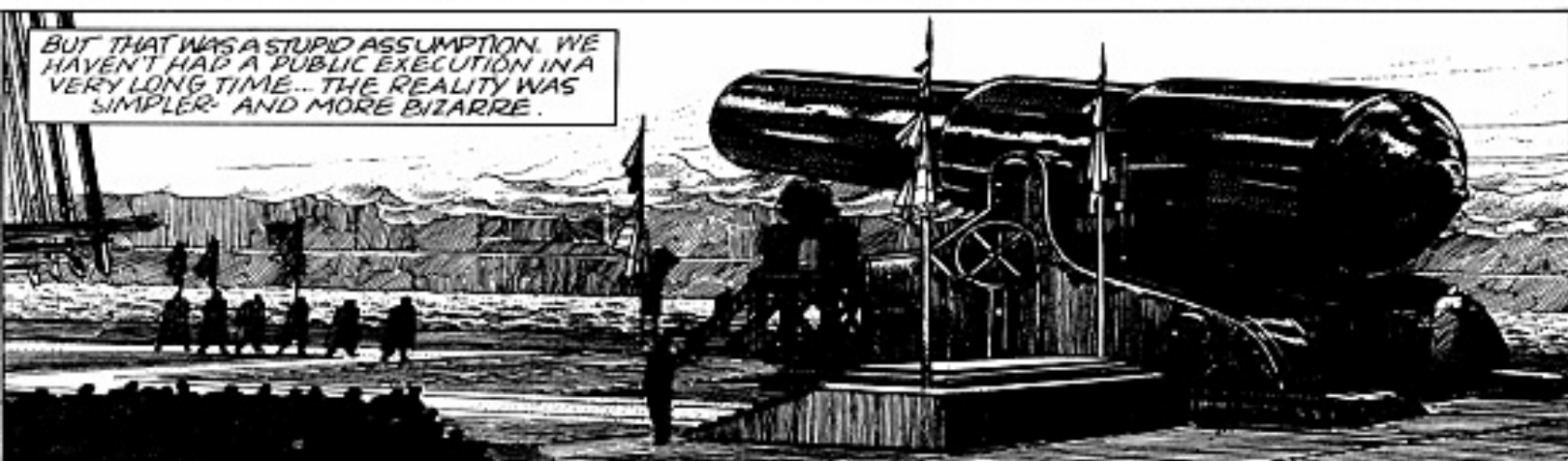


THE PEOPLE SEEM TO SENSE IT, TOO. CROWDS ARE GROWING ON THE RIVERBANK. THEY REALIZE NOTHING CAN STOP THE NETWORK NOW.





7 O'CLOCK THE SAME DAY, I COULD NO LONGER WRITE, BECAUSE I BECAME TRULY FRIGHTENED FOR A MOMENT IT LOOKED AS THOUGH THEY WERE PREPARING FOR A PUBLIC HANGING.



BUT THAT WAS A STUPID ASSUMPTION. WE HAVEN'T HAD A PUBLIC EXECUTION IN A VERY LONG TIME... THE REALITY WAS SIMPLER, AND MORE BIZARRE.

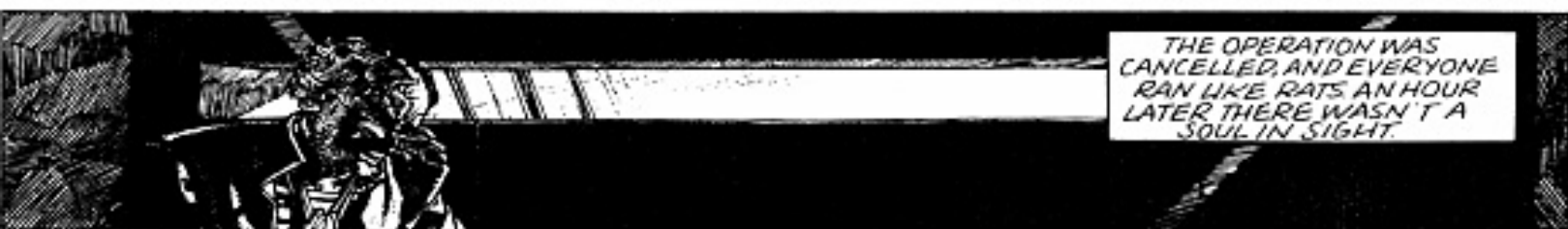
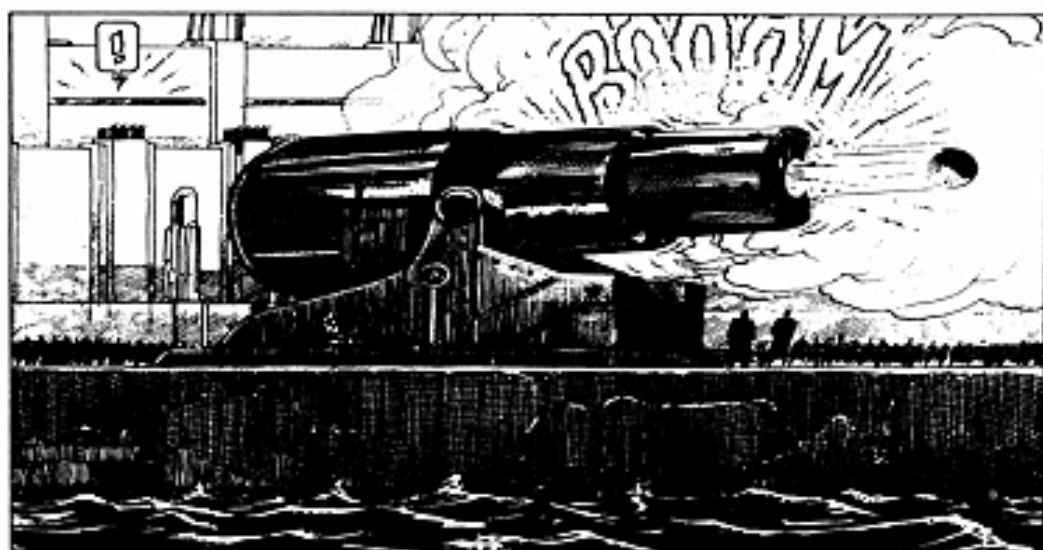


YOU SURE THIS WILL DO THE TRICK?

TRUST US, RECORDER. WE'LL BLOW THIS NETWORK SKY-HIGH!



READY, AIM...





JULY 8

DOWN... COMMISSION...

?

DOWN WITH THE COMMISSION!
FREE ROBICK!

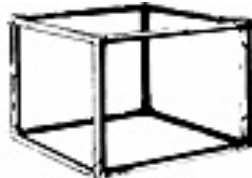
DOWN WITH THE COMMISSION!
FREE ROBICK!

WE WANT ROBICK!
WE WANT ROBICK!

SUDDENLY
THE DOOR
BURST
OPEN.

YOUR CASE HAS BEEN REVIEWED.
YOU'RE FREE TO GO NOW, SIR.

I DON'T KNOW HOW
LONG THEY STOOD OUTSIDE
CHANTING. IT FELT LIKE
HOURS... AT TIMES, I
THOUGHT I COULD HEAR
SOPHIE'S VOICE SHOUTING
WITH THE REST.



ROBICK! ROBICK!



WHEN I LOOKED BACK TOWARD THE BUILDING, MY SUSPICIONS WERE CONFIRMED.



IT WASN'T THE DEMONSTRATION THAT HAD MADE THEM LET ME GO. THEY'D DONE IT TO SAVE FACE: THE NETWORK HAD NOW REACHED THE PRISON, OFFERING THE PRISONERS NUMEROUS ESCAPE ROUTES.



SAY A FEW WORDS AT LEAST, EUGEN. YOU OWE IT TO THEM, DON'T YOU THINK?



MY FRIENDS, I THANK YOU FOR ALL THAT YOU'VE DONE. I WISH I COULD GIVE YOU SOME USEFUL ADVICE, BUT I'M AFRAID I CAN'T.



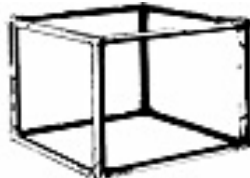
ALL WE CAN DO IS LET THIS PHENOMENON RUN ITS COURSE. OUR INTERFERENCE WILL ONLY MAKE MATTERS WORSE... TRUST ME, SOON THIS WILL ALL BE OVER. TIME WILL TAKE CARE OF THIS AS IT DOES WITH EVERYTHING ELSE.



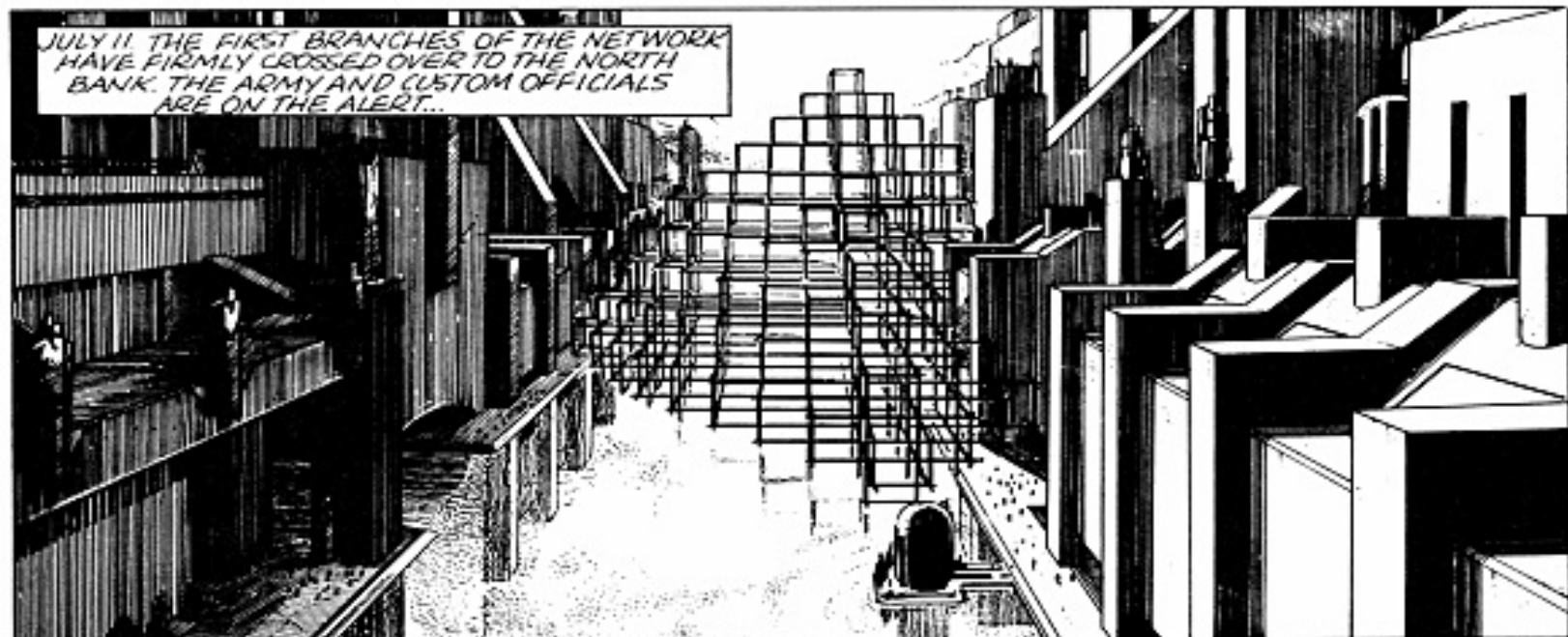
WHEN I FINISHED THE CROWD DRIFTED OFF SOMEHOW I FELT I'D DISAPPOINTED THEM.

BUT, SOPHIE, WHAT ELSE COULD I TELL THEM?

I DON'T KNOW... WE ALL EXPECT A LOT FROM YOU. YOU CAN'T LET US DOWN LIKE THIS!



JULY 11. THE FIRST BRANCHES OF THE NETWORK HAVE FIRMLY CROSSED OVER TO THE NORTH BANK. THE ARMY AND CUSTOM OFFICIALS ARE ON THE ALERT...



BUT DESPITE THEIR INCREASED SECURITY A FEW RESIDENTS HAVE ALREADY MANAGED TO CROSS THE RIVER.



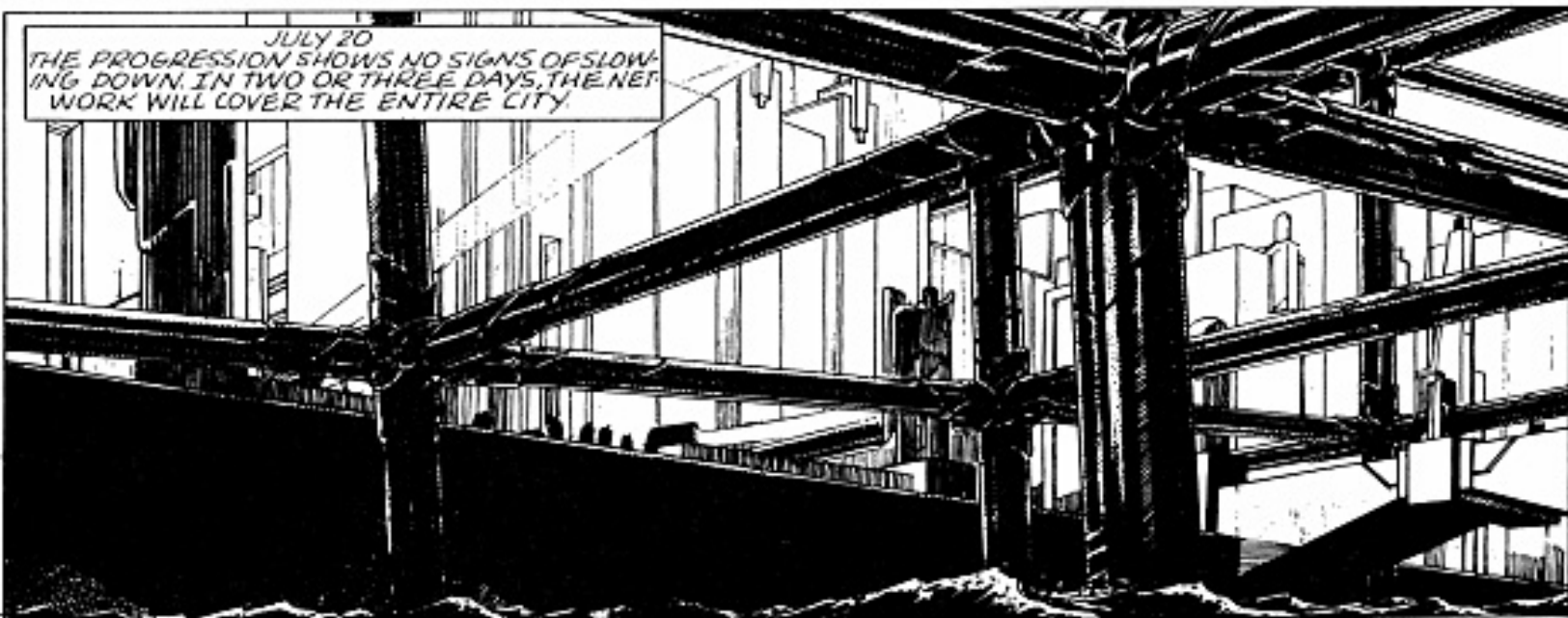
THEY'RE DOING THIS AT GREAT PERIL SINCE THE COMMISSION HAS ORDERED THAT ANYONE CAUGHT TRYING TO CROSS ILLEGALLY IS TO BE SHOT ON SIGHT. THERE IS ALSO THE RISK OF FALLING OFF THE NARROW SLIPPERY BRANCHES OF THE NETWORK...

JULY 10. THE NUMBER OF CROSSING-POINTS IS INCREASING ALL THE TIME. THE ARMY KEEPS TRYING TO POLICE THEM, BUT ITS MORALE IS LOW. I'VE HEARD RUMORS OF REBELLION WITHIN THE RANKS-- EVEN INCLUDING SOME OFFICERS.

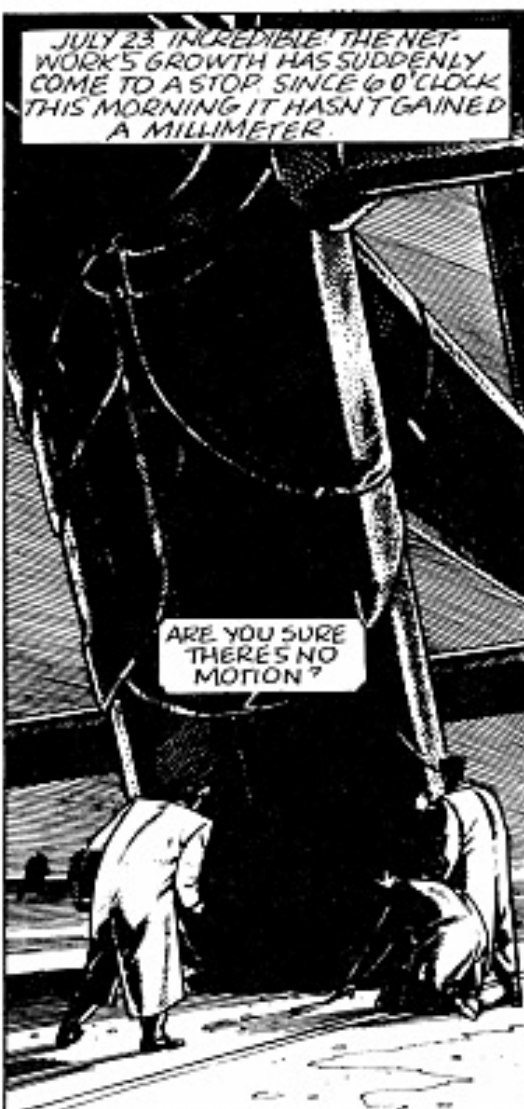




JULY 20
THE PROGRESSION SHOWS NO SIGNS OF SLOWING DOWN. IN TWO OR THREE DAYS, THE NETWORK WILL COVER THE ENTIRE CITY.



JULY 23. INCREDIBLE! THE NETWORK'S GROWTH HAS SUDDENLY COME TO A STOP. SINCE 6:00 CLOCK THIS MORNING IT HASN'T GAINED A MILLIMETER.



ARE YOU SURE THERE'S NO MOTION?

THE PUBLIC IS STUNNED. PEOPLE GATHER IN THE STREETS IN GROWING CROWDS, STILL NOT QUITE ABLE TO BELIEVE IT.



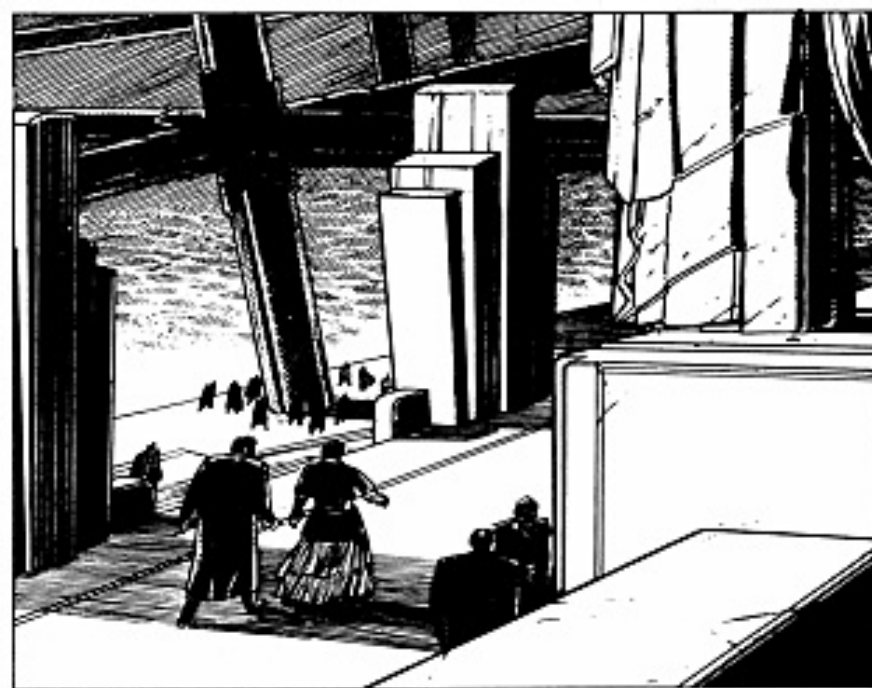
ABSOLUTELY!
IT'S THE BEST
THING THAT COULD
HAPPEN TO US!

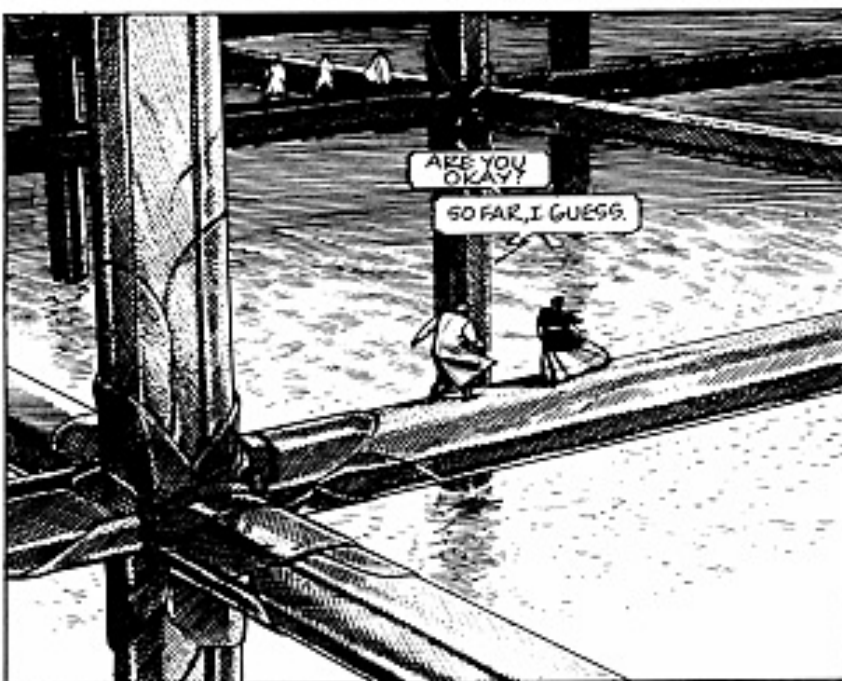
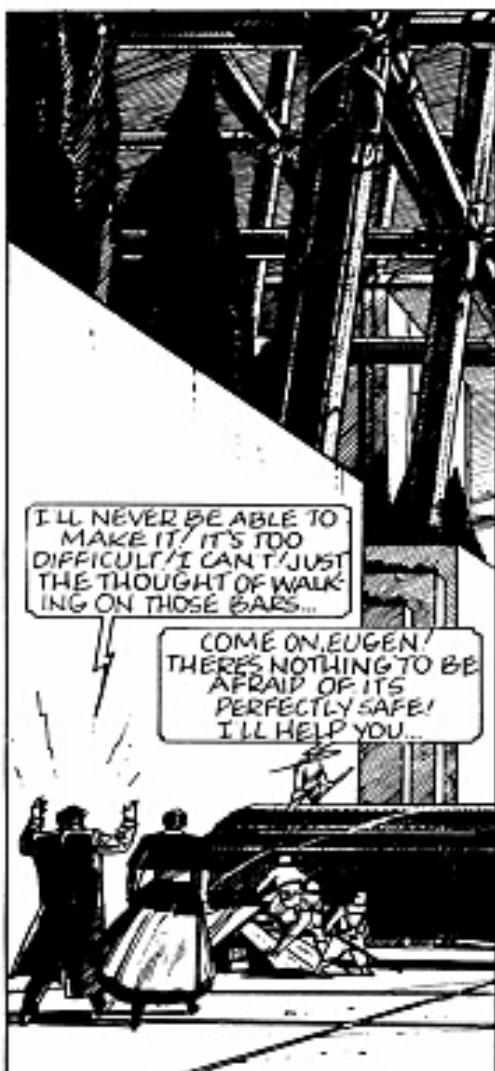
BUT MY
WHOLE
HOUSE IS
BLOCKED OFF!

WHEN WILL
THIS NIGHT-
MARE END?

WHY THIS SUDDEN HALT? NOTHING IN MY CALCULATIONS PREDICTED IT. ON THE CONTRARY, THE GROWTH CURVE SEEMED TO INDICATE UNLIMITED EXPANSION.









I REALLY DON'T SEE WHY YOU WANTED TO COME HERE. THIS PART OF THE CITY HAS NEVER BEEN AS NICE AS OURS. LOOK HOW DIRTY AND DISORDERLY EVERYTHING IS!

BUT EUGEN, DON'T YOU THINK IT'S STRANGE THAT EVEN THOUGH I WAS BORN IN THIS CITY I NEVER SET FOOT HERE?



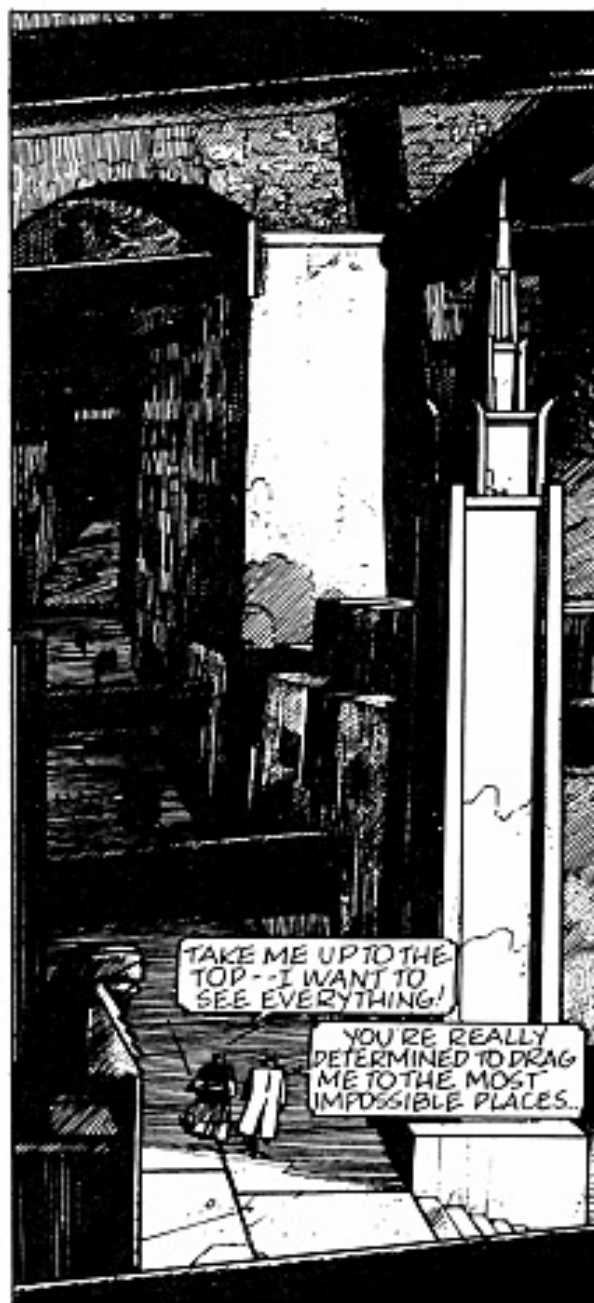
NOT AT ALL! THE POPULATION OF URBICAND'S TWO BANKS WERE KEPT APART ON PURPOSE. IF THAT HADN'T BEEN DONE THIS PART OF THE CITY WOULD'VE BEEN ABANDONED A LONG TIME AGO!



OH! LOOK! ISN'T THIS LOVELY, EUGEN?

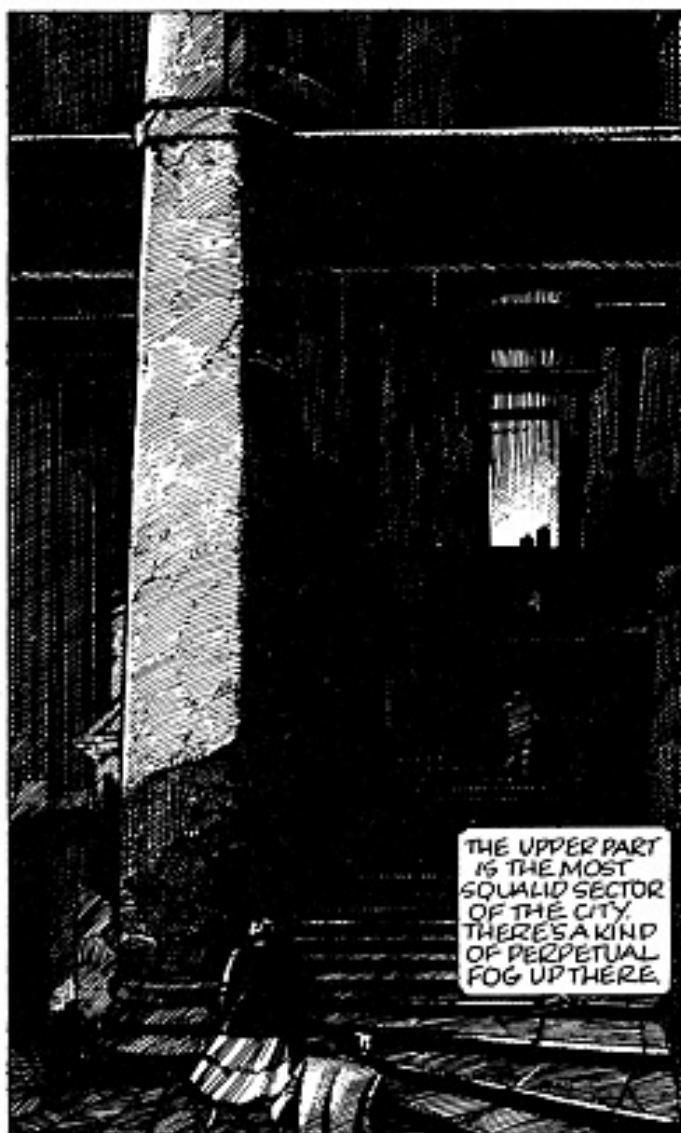


YES, YES IT IS... COME ON, LET'S KEEP MOVING.



TAKE ME UP TO THE TOP--I WANT TO SEE EVERYTHING!

YOU'RE REALLY DETERMINED TO DRAG ME TO THE MOST IMPOSSIBLE PLACES.



THE UPPER PART
IS THE MOST
SQUALID SECTOR
OF THE CITY.
THERE'S A KIND
OF PERPETUAL
FOG UP THERE.



I THINK WE SHOULD TURN
BACK NOW! THERE'S
NOTHING MORE TO SEE!!



DON'T BE SUCH A CRYBABY!
THERE'S NO REASON TO GO BACK
RIGHT AWAY... AREN'T YOU
HAPPY TO BE WITH ME?

OF COURSE I AM.
OK, OK...



LET'S GO THEN! I'VE NEVER
BEEN TO THE TOP MYSELF.



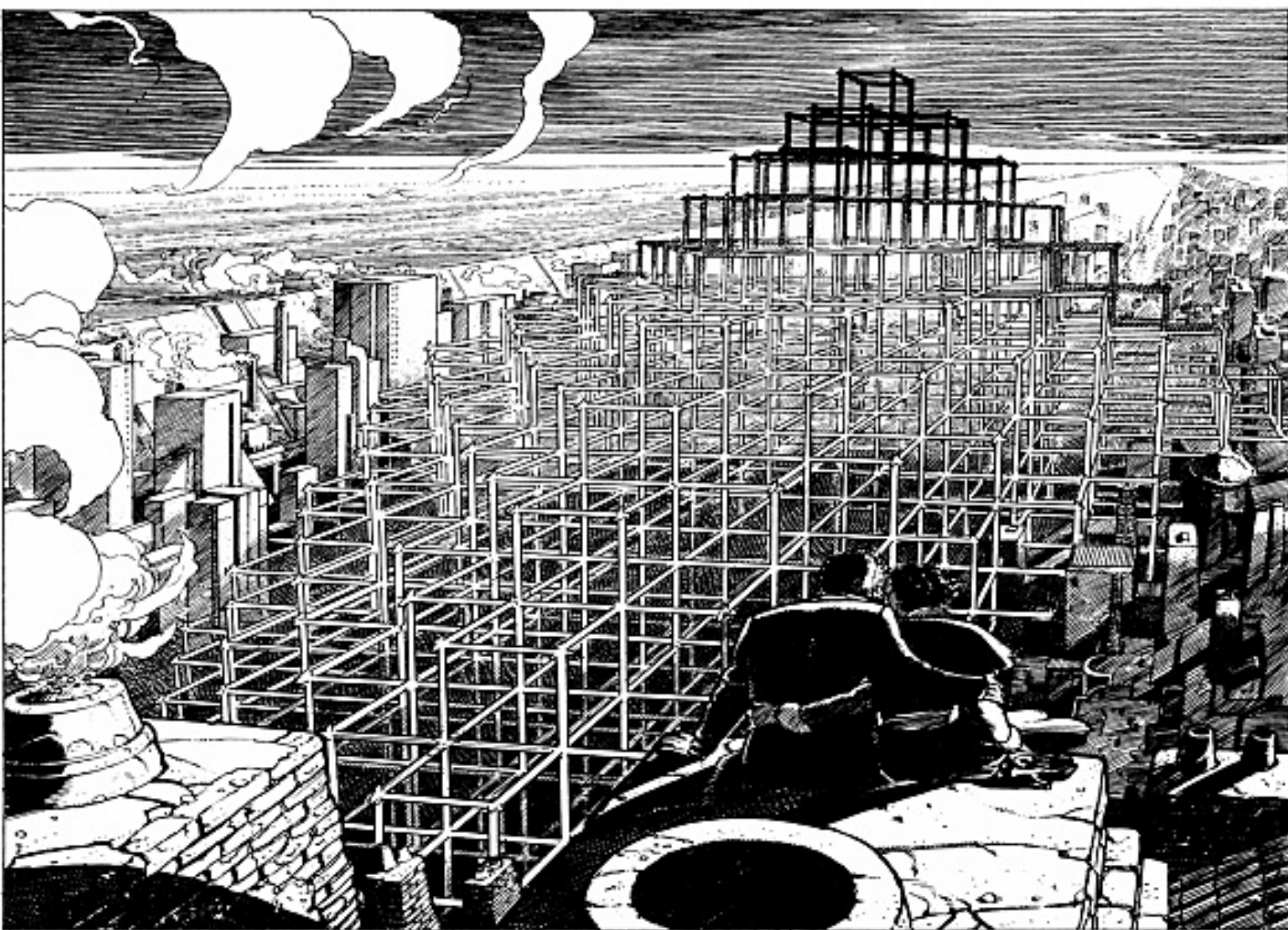
THIS AREA WAS SUPPOSED
TO BE TOTALLY RENOVATED.
THE PLANS HAVE BEEN
ON THE TABLE FOR A LONG
TIME. I DON'T KNOW WHY
THE WORK NEVER GOT
STARTED...



MAYBE IT'S NOT SO BAD THE
WAY IT IS.

YOU MAY BE
RIGHT. I'M
NOT SO SURE
ANYMORE.

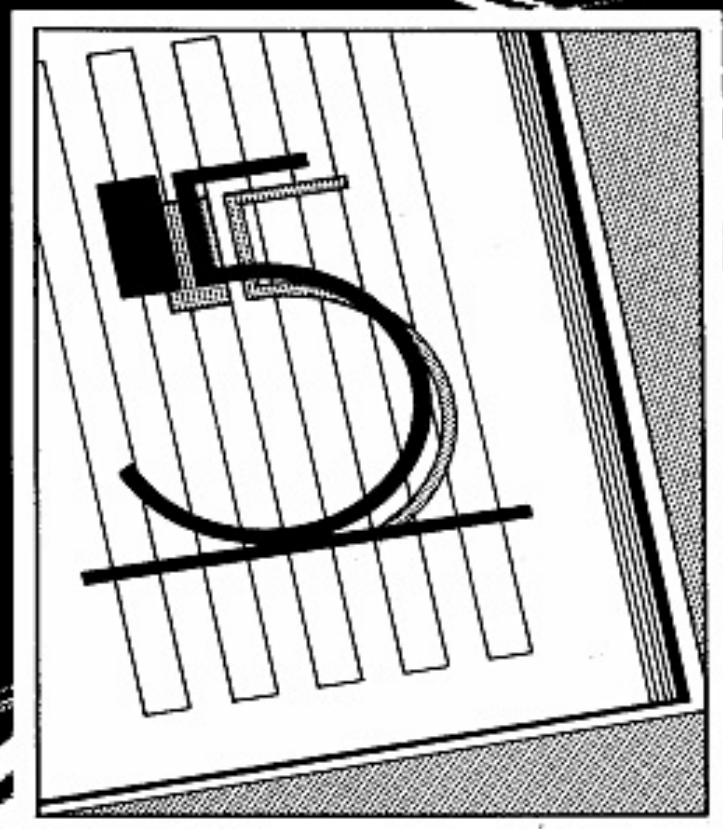




FEVER IN URBICAND

BY

SCHUITEN & PEETERS



JULY 24th.

We didn't return until dawn. I've wandered around the office all day, unable to work. I picked up this diary intending only to glance through it, but ended up reading every word.

IT'S SO HARD TO BELIEVE IT'S BEEN A MONTH TO THE DAY SINCE THAT SEEMINGLY ORDINARY CUBE WAS LEFT ON MY DESK. SO MUCH HAS HAPPENED SINCE THEN! AND WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

JULY 29th.

PEOPLE HAVE GROWN ACCUSTOMED TO THE NETWORK WITH SURPRISING EASE. IT STABILIZED LESS THAN A WEEK AGO, AND ALREADY IT SEEMS AS THOUGH IT WAS ALWAYS THERE.

EVERYONE'S BEEN TO THE NORTH BANK AT LEAST A FEW TIMES. NO ONE APPEARS TO CARE THAT DOING SO IS STILL OFFICIALLY PROHIBITED.

AUG. 2nd. AN ODD PHENOMENON HAS OCCURRED. IT BEGAN AS SOMEONE'S IDEA OF A GAME AND SPREAD QUICKLY.

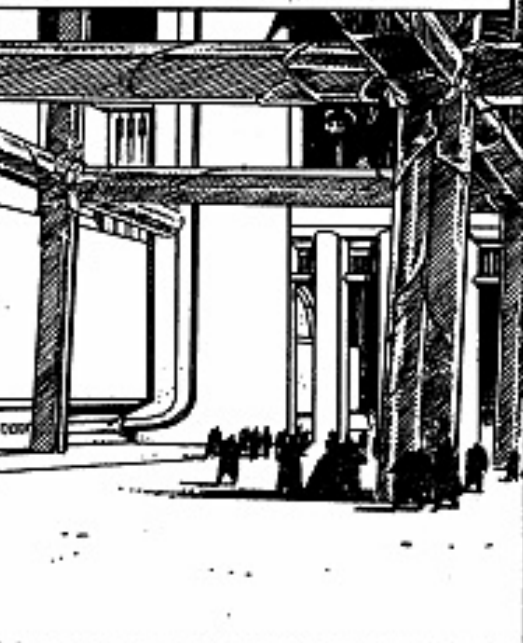
PEOPLE ARE GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH WHOMEVER LIVES DIRECTLY ACROSS FROM THEM ON THE LINE OF THE NETWORK. SUSTAINED RELATIONSHIPS ARE DEVELOPING. SOME HAVE EVEN GONE SO FAR AS TO TRADE APARTMENTS.

NONE OF THAT AFFECTS ME, HOWEVER. THE BRANCH WHICH CUTS THROUGH MY BUILDING LEADS STRAIGHT ACROSS THE RIVER-- TO A CUSTOMS CHECKPOINT?



AUGUST 10th. SEVERAL MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION HAVE REQUESTED VACATION LEAVE, ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE NO INTENTION OF RETURNING TO THEIR POST. THE MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT LOST ALL CONTROL SEVERAL DAYS AGO. URBICAND EXISTS IN A SORT OF PLEASANT CHAOS.

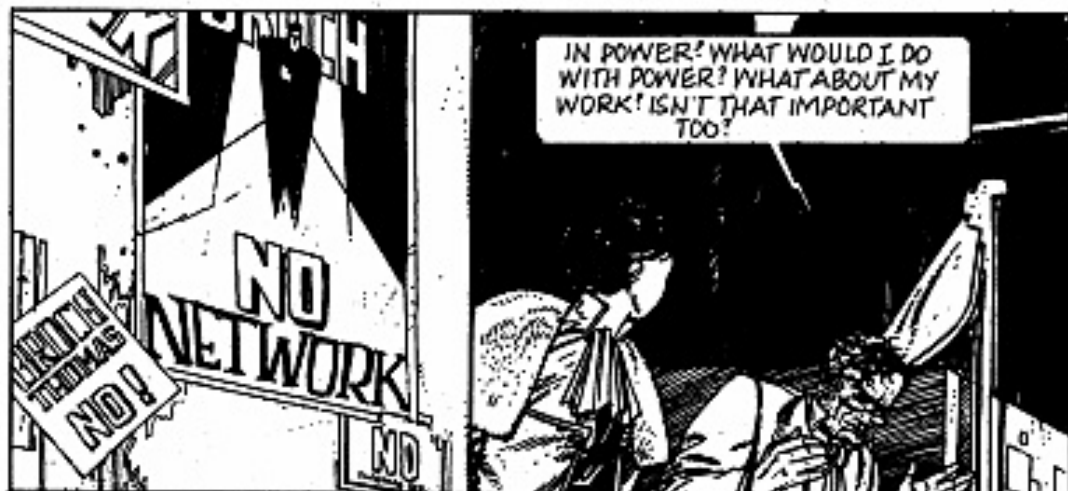
IN FACT, THE ONLY ONE WHO DOESN'T SEEM TO BE ACCEPTING THE SITUATION IS THOMAS. EVEN AS THE COMMISSIONERS ARE RESIGNING HE PREACHES A RETURN TO ORDER AND A SEPARATION OF THE TWO BANKS.



AUG. 13TH. WITHOUT BREATHING A WORD TO ME, SOPHIE HAS MOUNTED A CAMPAIGN PROMOTING ME FOR A POSITION OF AUTHORITY.



IN POWER? WHAT WOULD I DO WITH POWER? WHAT ABOUT MY WORK? ISN'T THAT IMPORTANT TOO?



WE HAVE TO GET URBICAND REORGANIZED TO DEAL WITH WHAT'S HAPPENING TODAY. WHO IS BETTER QUALIFIED FOR THAT THAN YOU?

BUT SOPHIE, MY WORK ISN'T FOR TODAY, IT'S FOR THE FUTURE. MY WORK WILL BE BUILT OF STONE. IT WILL OUTLAST SPEECHES AND LAWS.



AN URGENT
FOR URBICAND
EUGEN

THOMAS
BROCK

NO NETWORK
GRADE

LOOK HERE, EUGEN, IT'S THE PERFECT TIME. PEOPLE FEEL HELPLESS. THEY'RE LOOKING FOR ANSWERS. EVERYONE WANTS YOU IN POWER.



THAT WORK IS IN JEOPARDY SOPHIE.
IT HAS NO MEANING NOW THAT THIS
NETWORK HAS APPEARED OUT OF
NOWHERE. I'VE GOT TO RE-THINK
EVERYTHING. RESTORE MEANING
TO MY PLANS AND PROJECTS.



DO AS YOU LIKE, BUT THINK
IT OVER, BEFORE RUSHING
INTO A DECISION.

THERE'S NO NEED.
I'VE ALREADY
THOUGHT IT OVER.



AUG. 15th. I'VE BEEN CONVINCED FOR
SEVERAL DAYS: WE CAN INTEGRATE
THE ELEMENTS OF THE NETWORK
INTO THE HOMES THEY PASS
THROUGH. NOW THAT THE BARS ARE
A PART OF OUR CITY, IT WOULD
BE ABSURD TO IGNORE THEM.



MANY PEOPLE WILL DO ANYTHING TO
DISGUISE THE BRANCHES. SOME
EVEN REFUSE TO LIVE IN ROOMS
THAT THE BARS GO THROUGH.



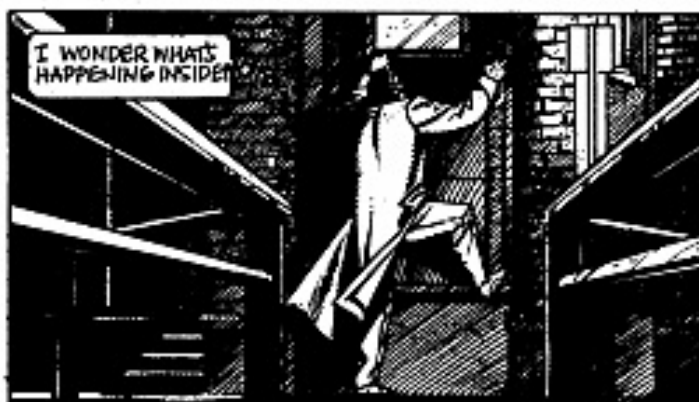
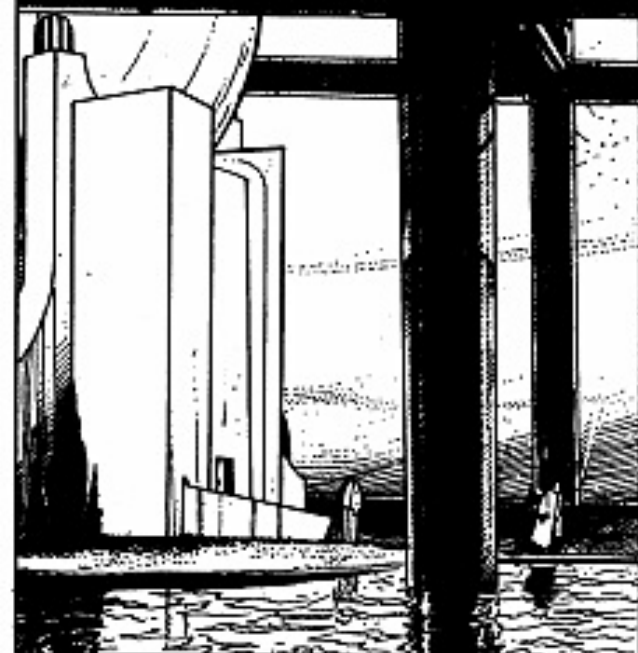
NEITHER ACTION IS A GOOD SOLUTION.
WE NEED TO BRING DISTURBING
ELEMENTS INTO BALANCE WITH
USEFUL ONES, BUILDING ONTO THE
NETWORK FOR OUR OWN PURPOSES.

OTHERS DO JUST THE OPPOSITE, MAK-
ING THEM INTO SHOW PIECES BY
PAINTING THEM BRIGHT COLORS.

AUGUST 17th.
PEOPLE ARE ALREADY BUILDING MORE
AND MORE STRUCTURES ON THE PART OF
THE NETWORK THAT CROSSES THE RIVER.

THEY'VE SHOWN
ASTONISHING INGENUITY
IN RAPIDLY ERECTING
ALL KINDS OF THINGS
TO MAKE LIFE EASIER.

I'M AMAZED BY HOW QUICKLY THAT
PART OF THE NETWORK HAS BECOME
THE TRUE CENTER OF OUR CITY.



MEETING PLACES HAVE SPRUNG UP
AT MOST OF THE INTERSECTIONS.
THEY HAVE AN INCREDIBLE
VARIETY OF USES...

WHAT AN ODD
STRUCTURE! IT
LOOKS LIKE A
NORTH BANK
LOCKUP

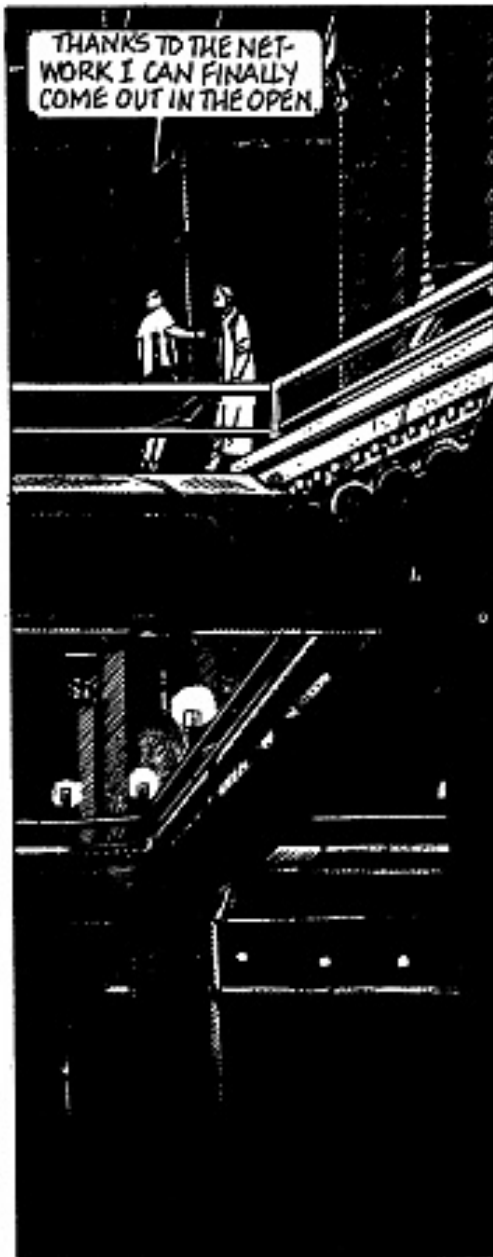
I WONDER WHAT'S
HAPPENING INSIDE

SO THERE YOU ARE!
YOU'VE FINALLY COME
OUT OF YOUR LAIR!

?



IT'S YOU,
SOPHIE! YOU
STARTLED ME!



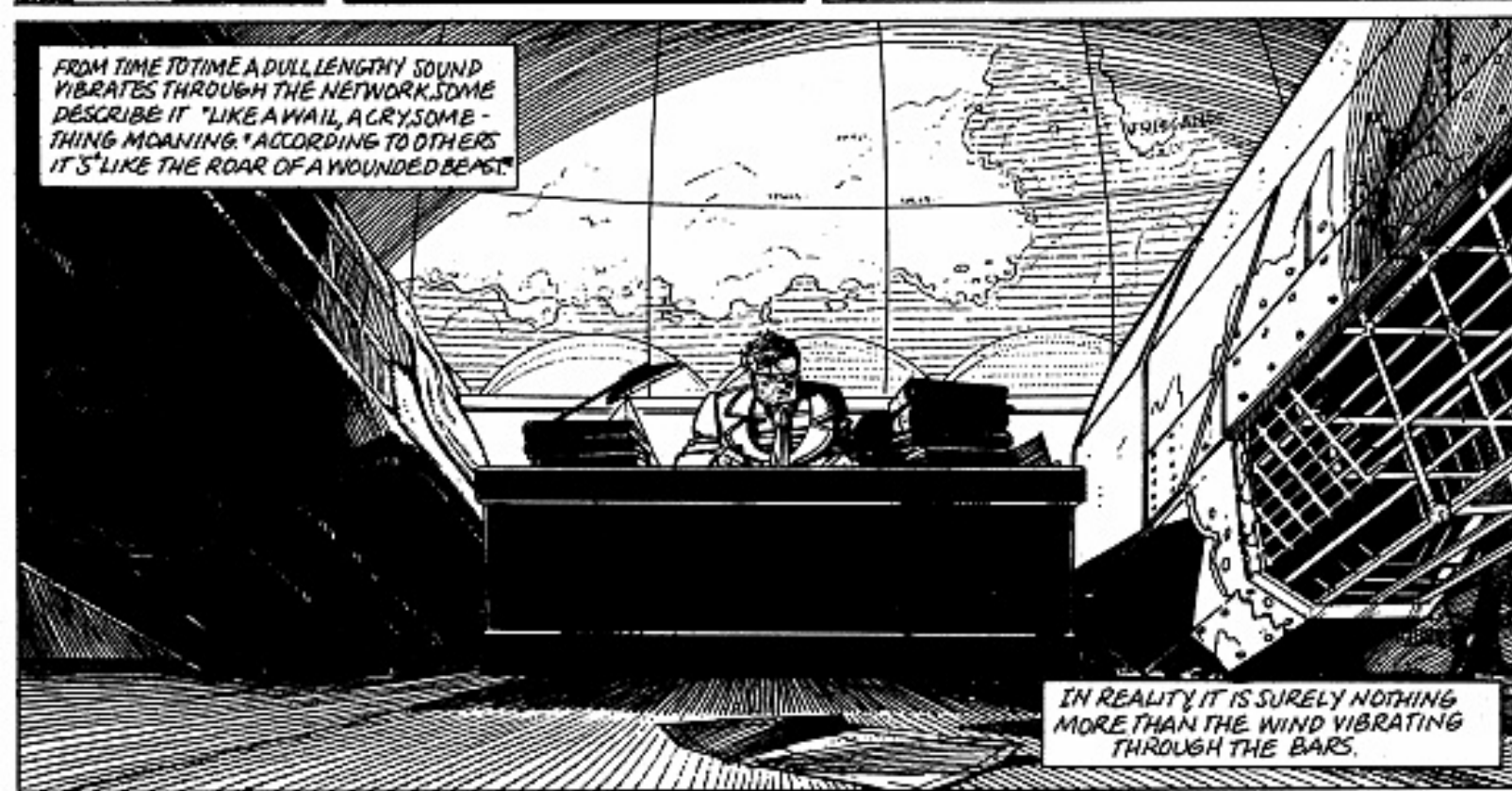
THANKS TO THE NET-
WORK I CAN FINALLY
COME OUT IN THE OPEN.



BUSINESS IS BETTER FORME
THAN EVER. THESE SMALL
ENCOUNTER HOUSES ARE
CROPPING UP ALL OVER
THE PLACE. THEY'RE
THE LATEST RAGE!



EUGEN, YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE WHAT
A WONDERFUL TIME I'M HAVING!



FROM TIME TO TIME A DULL LENGTHY SOUND
VIBRATES THROUGH THE NETWORK. SOME
DESCRIBE IT "LIKE A WAIL, A CRY, SOME-
THING MEANING." ACCORDING TO OTHERS
IT'S LIKE THE ROAR OF A WOUNDED BEAST.

IN REALITY IT IS SURELY NOTHING
MORE THAN THE WIND VIBRATING
THROUGH THE BARS.

SEPTEMBER 6TH.
I'M TIRED OF ALL THE EXCITEMENT, THE
PERPETUAL HUSTLE AND BUSTLE. A FEW DAYS
AWAY FROM URBICAND WILL DO ME SOME GOOD.



THIS MORNING I SET OUT ON THE ROAD TO ALAXIS.
I WANTED TO SEE THE WHOLE NETWORK AND ITS
IMPACT ON OUR CITY'S APPEARANCE. I THOUGHT
THIS ROAD WOULD HAVE THE BEST VIEW.



WHAT A FOOL
I'VE BEEN!

SEPTEMBER 6th.
THE SPECTACLE IS TRULY STRIKING FROM THIS
DISTANCE. I FINALLY REALIZED THAT ONLY CHANCE
KEPT THE GRID FROM DEVELOPING INTO A BIZARRE,
BUT PERFECTLY FORMED, PYRAMID.



IF ON THAT FIRST DAY, THOMAS HAD NOT SET THE
CUBE DOWN AT AN ANGLE, LEANING AGAINST A
BOOK, URBICAND WOULD NOW LOOK QUITE DIFFERENT.



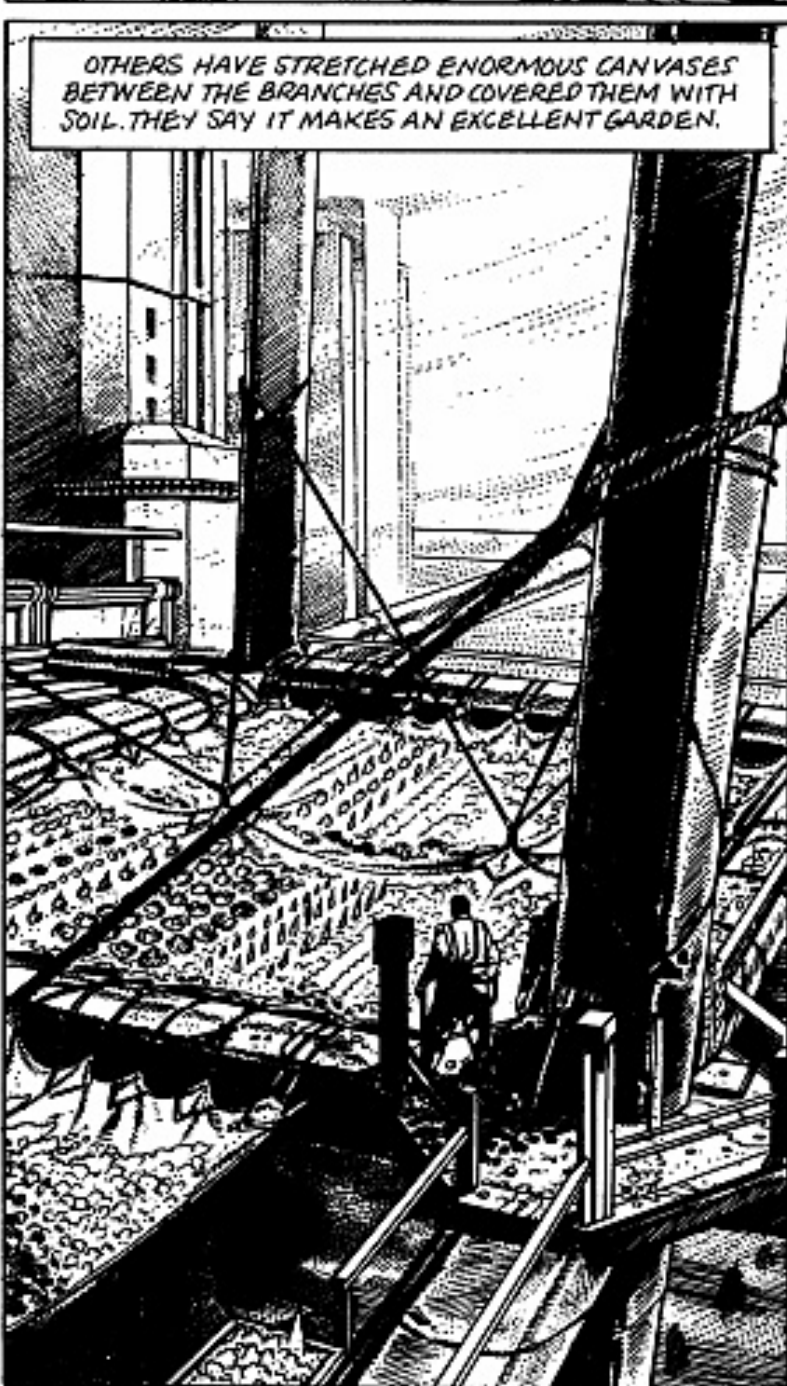
SEPTEMBER 17th.
ACTIVITY ON THE NETWORK IS AT A
FEVER PITCH. EVERY DAY SOMEONE
FINDS A DIFFERENT WAY TO PROFIT
FROM THE SITUATION.



SOME TAKE CONTROL OF WHOLE SECTIONS
OF THE NETWORK AND EXACT A TOLL
FROM ANYONE PASSING THAT POINT.



OTHERS HAVE STRETCHED ENORMOUS CANVASES
BETWEEN THE BRANCHES AND COVERED THEM WITH
SOIL. THEY SAY IT MAKES AN EXCELLENT GARDEN.



THIS PRACTICE HAS HAD A CATASTROPHIC EFFECT ON
THOSE LIVING ON THE LEVELS BELOW. OVERNIGHT,
WHOLE NEIGHBORHOODS HAVE BEEN THROWN
INTO PERMANENT TWILIGHT.



OCTOBER 9th. I'VE SET A GARGANTUAN TASK FOR MYSELF: I'M GOING TO MAKE A DETAILED MAP OF ALL OF URBICAND, INCLUDING EVERY BIT OF THE NETWORK.



NOW I ONLY LEAVE HOME TO WORK, CHECKING ON THE EXACT LOCATION OF EVERY BRANCH.



I HAVEN'T SEEN MUCH OF SOPHIE FOR SEVERAL WEEKS. SHE SEEMS VERY BUSY EXPANDING HER BUSINESS.



SHE IS PROBABLY ALSO A LITTLE DISAPPOINTED BY MY LACK OF ENTHUSIASM FOR HER POLITICAL IDEAS.

NOVEMBER 16th. IT SNOWED LAST NIGHT. THE BARS ARE NOW EXTREMELY DANGEROUS.



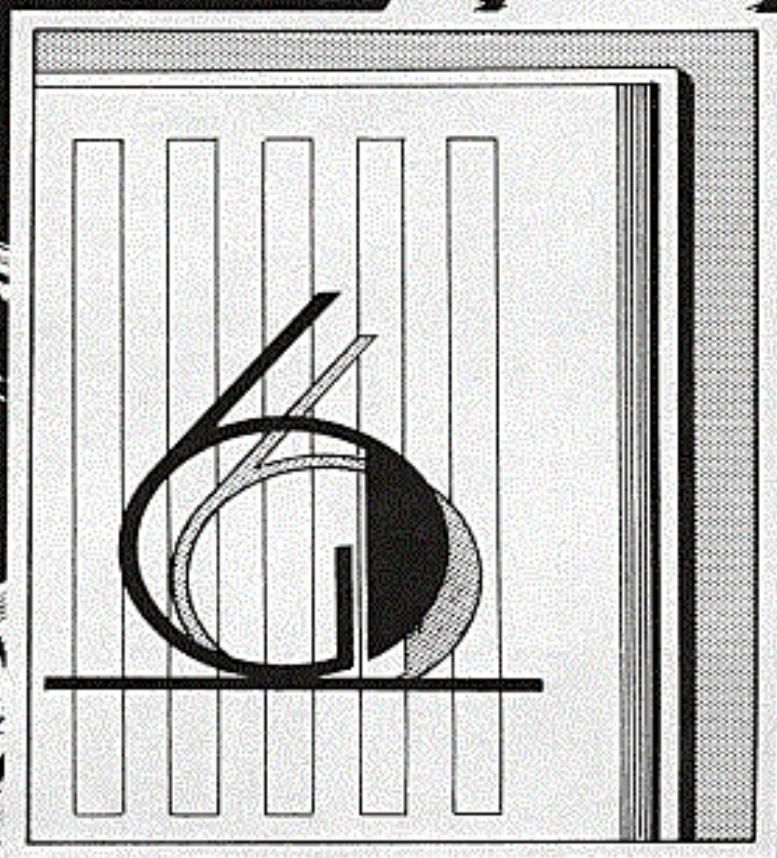
NOVEMBER 18th. THERE WERE THREE SERIOUS ACCIDENTS THIS MORNING. WHY DO PEOPLE INSIST ON USING THE NETWORK WHEN IT'S NOT SAFE?

TO BE CONCLUDED...

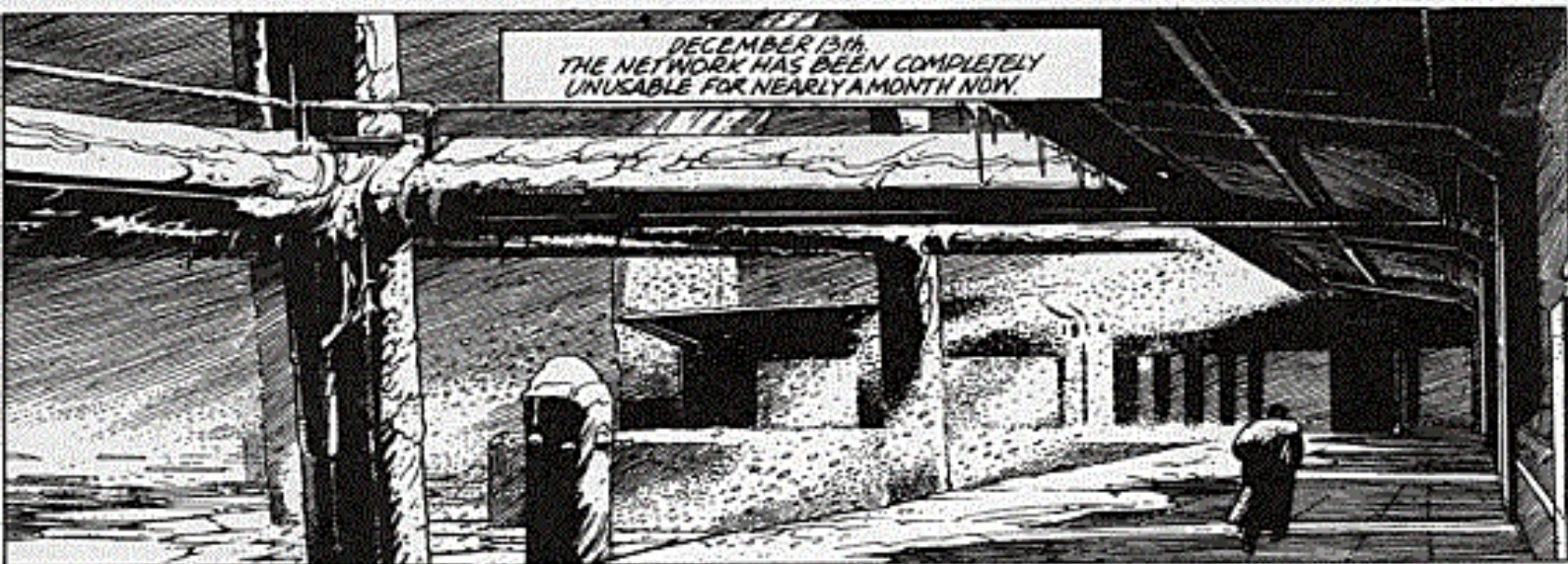
FEVER IN URBICAND

BY

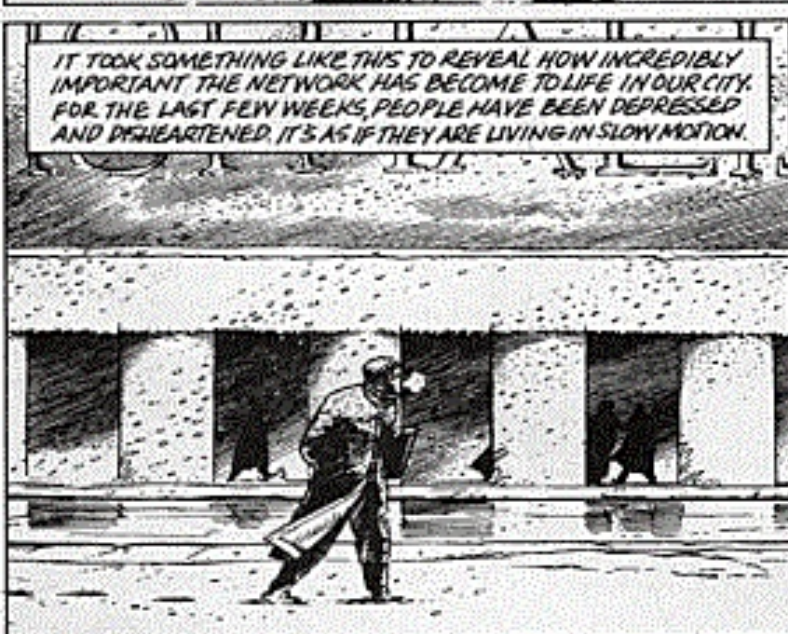
SCHUITEN & PEETERS



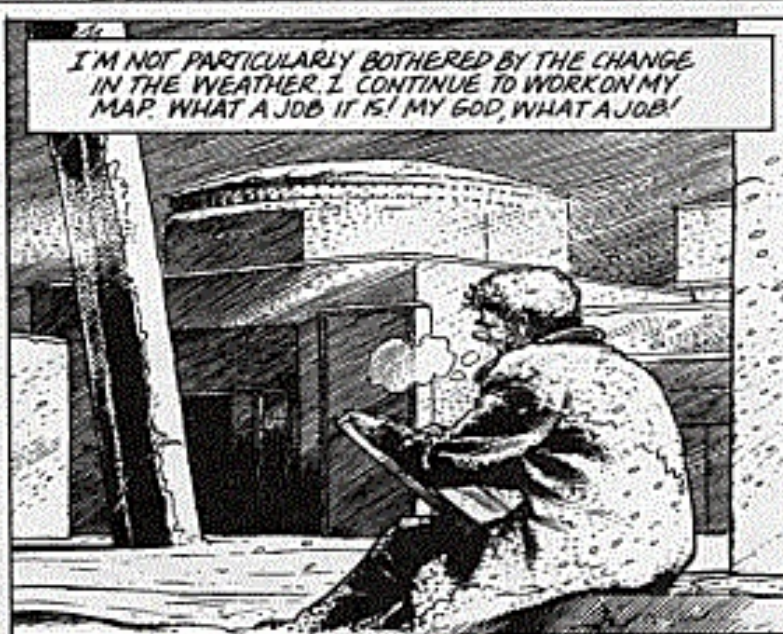
DECEMBER 13th.
THE NETWORK HAS BEEN COMPLETELY
UNUSABLE FOR NEARLY A MONTH NOW.



IT TOOK SOMETHING LIKE THIS TO REVEAL HOW INCREDIBLY
IMPORTANT THE NETWORK HAS BECOME TO LIFE IN OUR CITY.
FOR THE LAST FEW WEEKS, PEOPLE HAVE BEEN DEPRESSED
AND DISHEARTENED. IT'S AS IF THEY ARE LIVING IN SLOW MOTION.



I'M NOT PARTICULARLY BOTHERED BY THE CHANGE
IN THE WEATHER. I CONTINUE TO WORK ON MY
MAP. WHAT A JOB IT IS! MY GOD, WHAT A JOB!



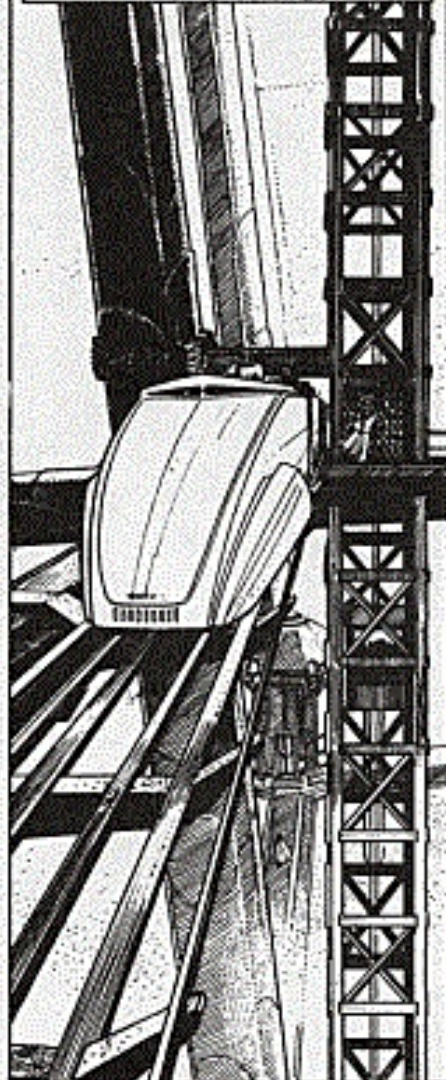
FEBRUARY 22nd. IT'S FINALLY THAWED!
EVERYONE IS EUPHORIC. ALL ALONG THE
RIVER, PEOPLE ARE HOLDING EXTRAVAGANT
PARTIES. I SAW SOPHIE AGAIN LAST NIGHT...



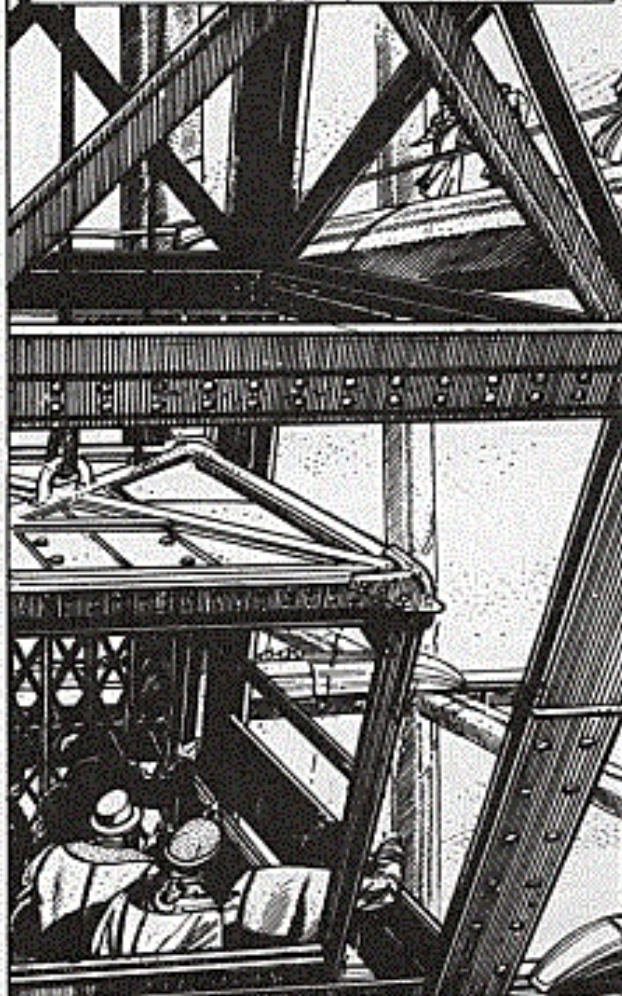
MARCH 4TH. LIFE ON THE NETWORK IS MORE ACTIVE THAN EVER. WE NOW HAVE EVERY POSSIBLE MEANS OF FACILITATING TRANSIT.



IN ADDITION TO THE ELEVATORS, THEY'VE JUST INSTALLED A RAIL LINE LINKING SEVERAL OF THE BRANCHES.

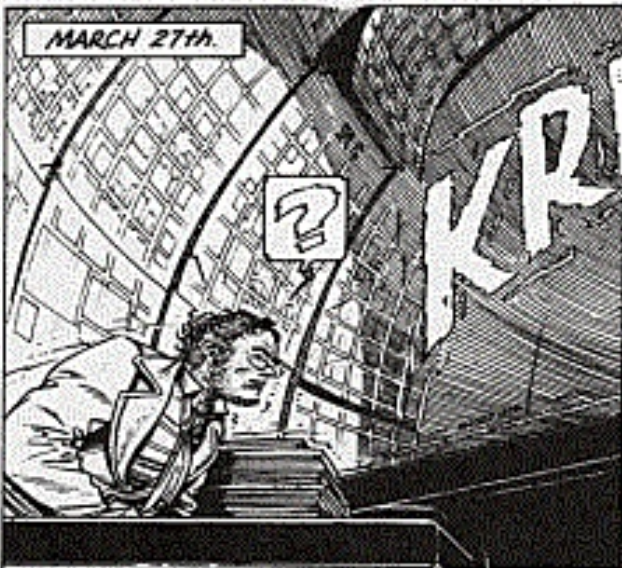


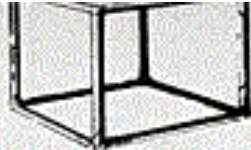
THE BACKERS ARE WAITING TO SEE HOW THIS TRIAL TRACK DOES BEFORE BUILDING A COMPLETE SYSTEM.



PERSONALLY, I DON'T THINK IT WILL BE A SUCCESS. I BELIEVE PEOPLE WILL TIRE OF IT QUICKLY AND RETURN TO THEIR OWN METHODS.

MARCH 27TH.





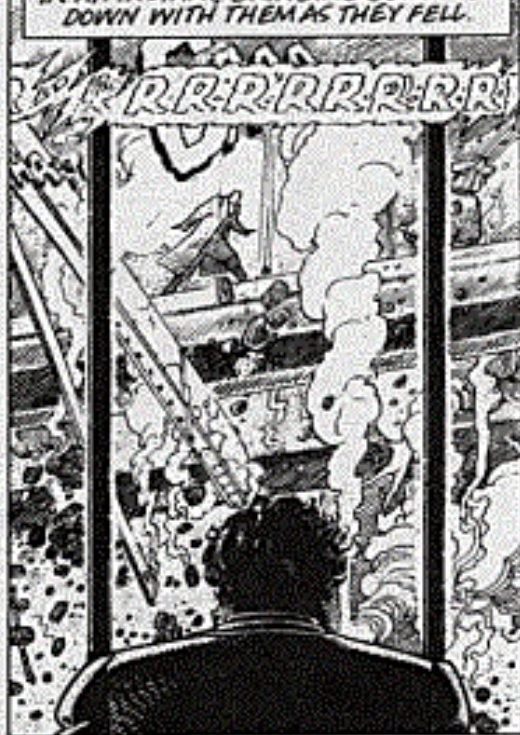
I WAS AT MY DESK THIS MORNING WHEN WE HAD A TERRIFYING EARTHQUAKE.



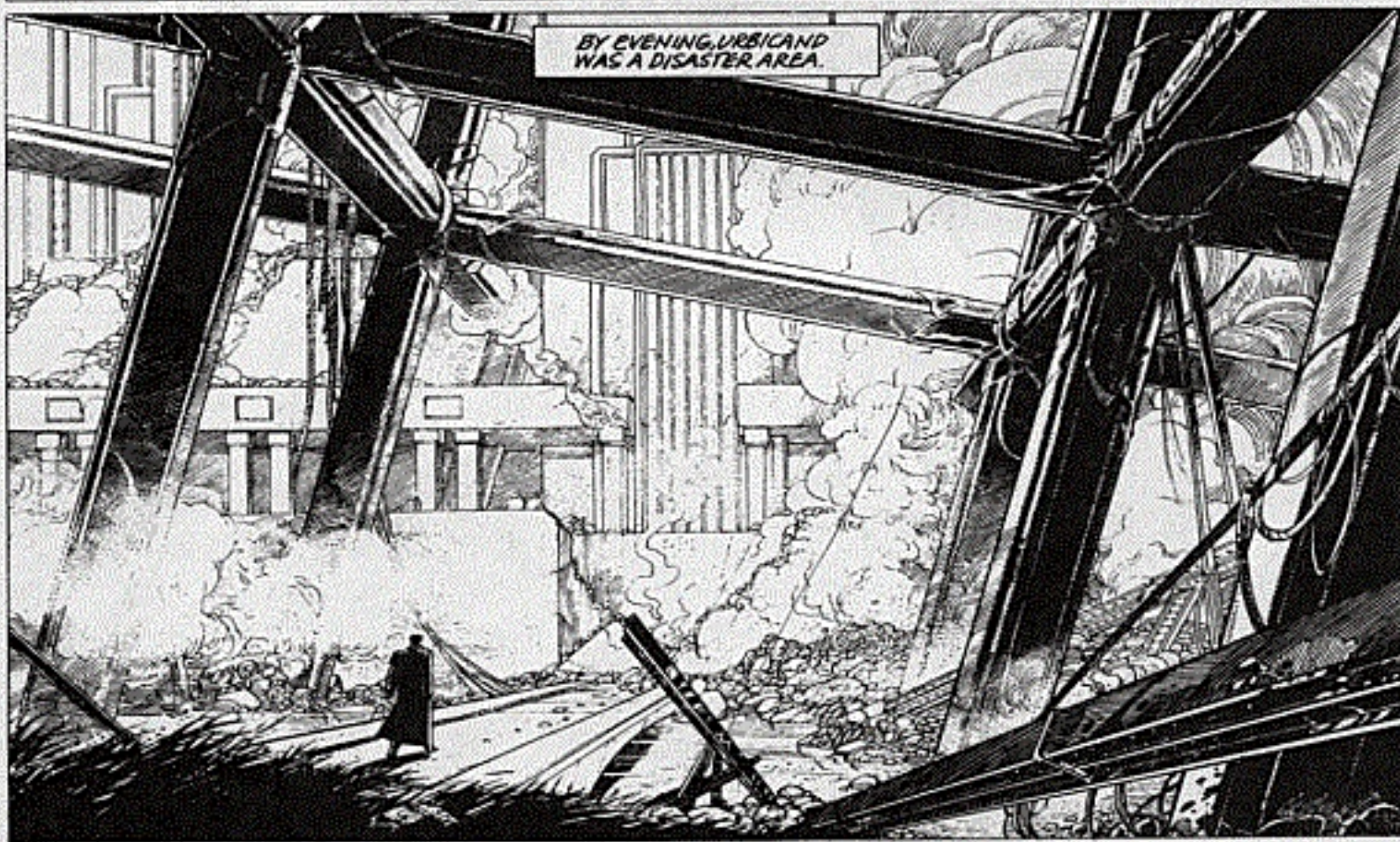
AS ABRUPTLY AS IT HAD STOPPED, THE NETWORK RESUMED ITS PROGRESS. BUT WHY? WHY?

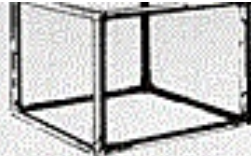


ALL THE STRUCTURES WHICH HAD USED THE GRID AS A FOUNDATION COLLAPSED IN AN INSTANT BRINGING BUILDINGS DOWN WITH THEM AS THEY FELL.



BY EVENING, URBICAND WAS A DISASTER AREA.





MARCH 28th.
WE'VE BARELY BEGUN TO TAKE STOCK OF
THE MAGNITUDE OF THE CATASTROPHE.



HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE WERE KILLED DURING THE
COLLAPSE, MANY MORE ARE MISSING.



THIS EVENING, THE RECORDER'S BODY
WAS FOUND BENEATH THE RUBBLE.

A WAVE OF ANGER HAS
OVERTAKEN URBICAH.
LOOTING AND VANDALISM
SEEM TO BE CONTAGIOUS.

LOOK!
THERE HE IS!



PEOPLE ARE SUCH FOOLS.
THEY ARE READY TO BLAME
ME FOR WHAT HAPPENED

WHY DIDN'T YOU WARN
US? I BET YOU KNEW
THIS WOULD HAPPEN
ALL ALONG!

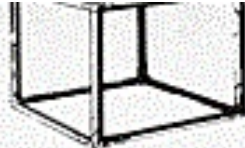
LOOK AT MY
HOUSE! THERE'S
NOTHING LEFT!



MY OFFICE WHERE THE
PHENOMENON HAD
BEGUN, WAS SPARED
BY THE COLLAPSE.
THAT DIDN'T MAKE
THINGS ANY BETTER.

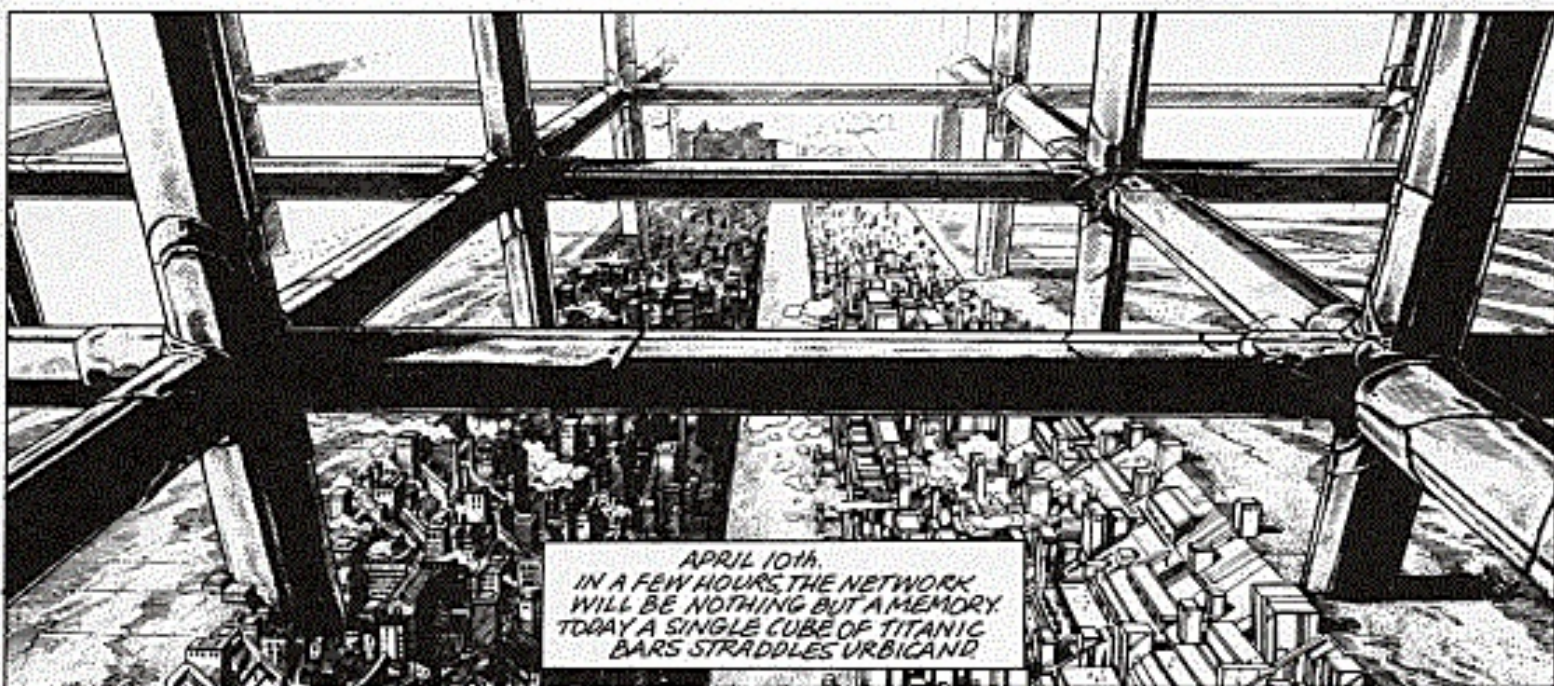
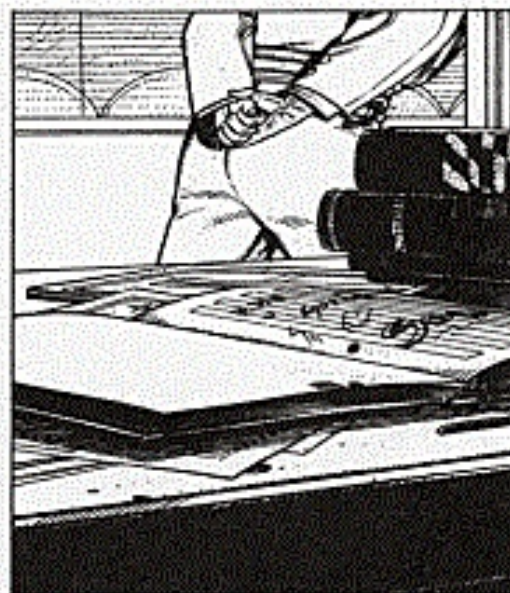
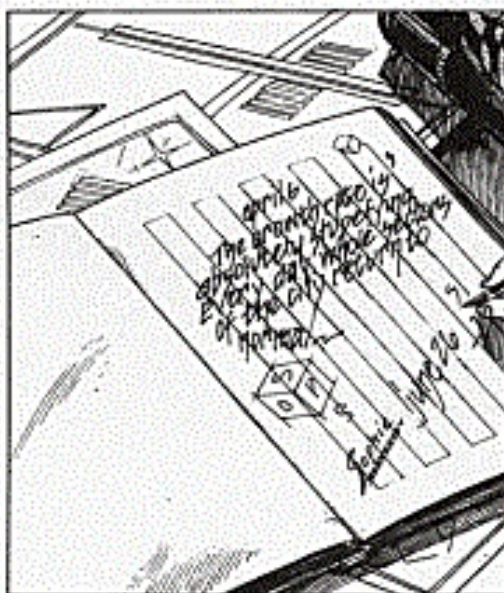
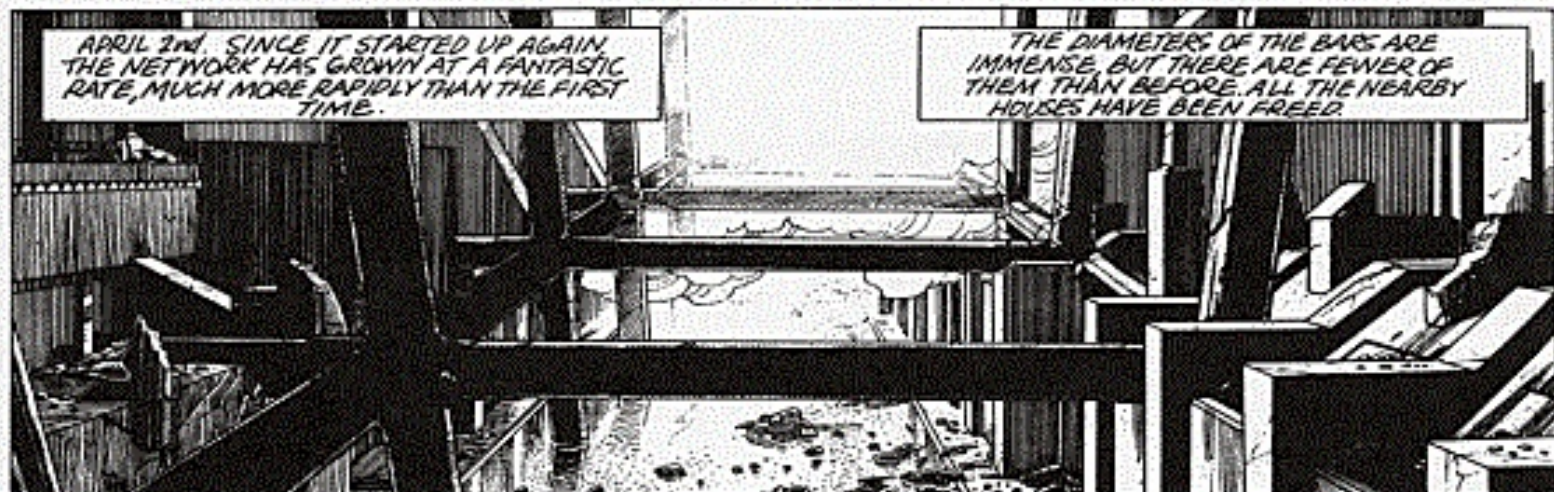
IT'S HIM!



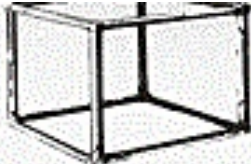


APRIL 2nd. SINCE IT STARTED UP AGAIN THE NETWORK HAS GROWN AT A FANTASTIC RATE, MUCH MORE RAPIDLY THAN THE FIRST TIME.

THE DIAMETERS OF THE BARS ARE IMMENSE, BUT THERE ARE FEWER OF THEM THAN BEFORE. ALL THE NEARBY HOUSES HAVE BEEN FREED.



APRIL 10th.
IN A FEW HOURS THE NETWORK
WILL BE NOTHING BUT A MEMORY.
TODAY A SINGLE CUBE OF TITANIC
BARS STRADDLES URBICAND.



APRIL 12TH, THOMAS' ROLE WITHIN THE COMMISSION HAS GROWN CONSIDERABLY MORE IMPORTANT. EVERYONE IS IMPRESSED BY HIS RELATIVE YOUTH, HIS FERVOR AND SOUNDNESS.

HE'S JUST BEEN NAMED "CHIEF COMMISSIONER AND ACTING RECORDER" WHO WOULD HAVE PREDICTED THAT A YEAR AGO?

HE'S ORGANIZED A BIG RECEPTION, SUPPOSEDLY TO CELEBRATE HIS NEW POSITION, BUT ACTUALLY IN RELIEF THAT THE NETWORK IS GONE. I'VE DECIDED TO ATTEND.

URBICAND
CITY HALL

ARE YOU A
GUEST SIR?

WHY YES...
OF COURSE.

MAY I SEE YOUR
INVITATION?

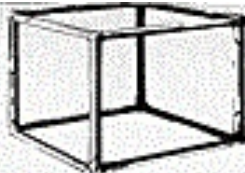
INVITATION?
I DON'T
BELIEVE I...

WELL,
THEN...

LET HIM IN, I'LL
VOUCH FOR HIM.

GO RIGHT IN,
SIR!

COME ON, ROBICK!



WELL, RDBICK YOUR HEAD STILL
IN THE CLOUDS. YOUR NETWORK'S
DISAPPEARING...



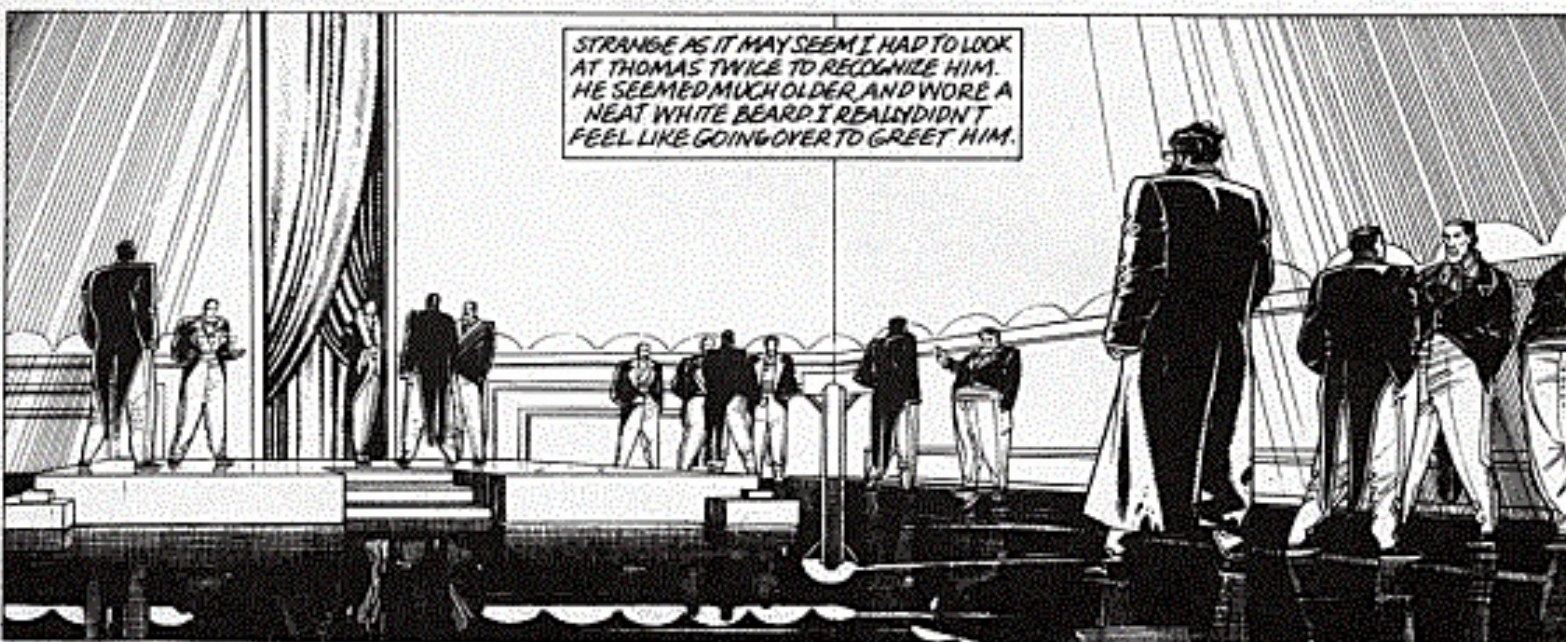
THE NETWORK MY FRIEND HAS ENTERED ITS
COSMIC ERA. FAR FROM DISAPPEARING, IT IS
NOW EXPANDING ACROSS THE HEAVENS! IT
WON'T STOP. IT WILL JUST WEAVE AN IMMENSE
PATTERN ACROSS THE ENTIRE GALAXY...



NOW NOW, LET'S NOT GET
CARRIED AWAY! ANYWAY
IT DOESN'T CONCERN US
ANYMORE...



STRANGE AS IT MAY SEEM I HAD TO LOOK
AT THOMAS TWICE TO RECOGNIZE HIM.
HE SEEMED MUCH OLDER AND WORE A
NEAT WHITE BEARD. I REALLY DIDN'T
FEEL LIKE GOING OVER TO GREET HIM.

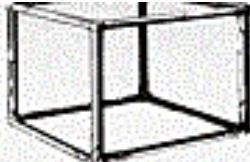


SOPHIE WAS DEEP IN AN INTENSE CONVERSATION
WITH ONE OF THE COMMISSIONERS. SHE WAVED
AT ME... I COULDN'T BRING MYSELF TO
WALK OVER TO HER, EITHER.

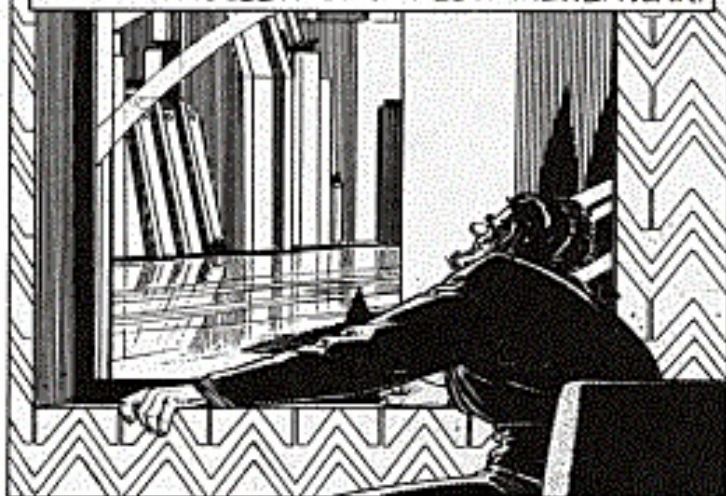


ALL AT ONCE I DIDN'T
KNOW WHY I WAS THERE.
I STOOD UP AND WALKED
OUT.





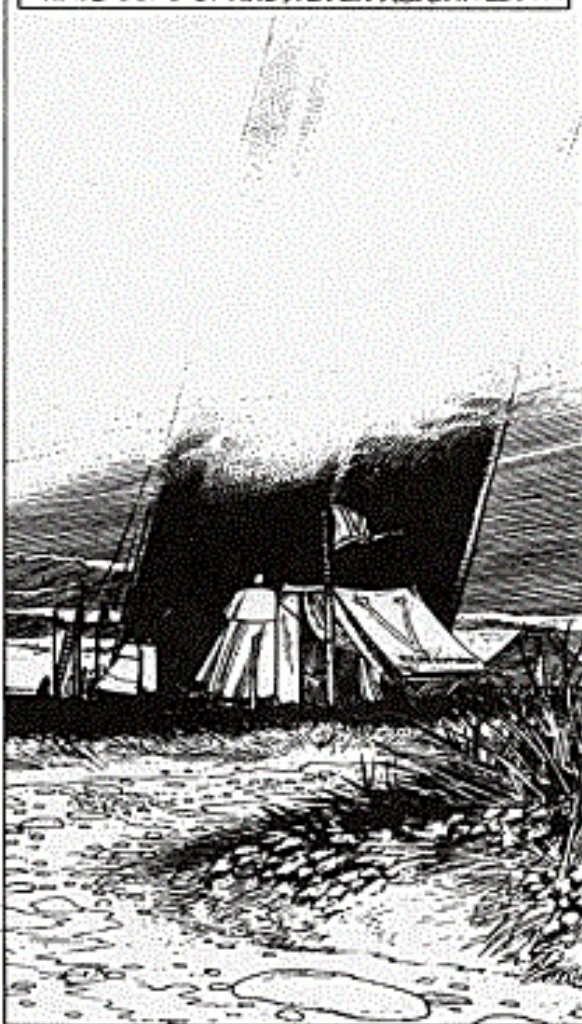
APRIL 15th. THE LAST BAR GREW FARTHER AND FARTHER AWAY AND EVENTUALLY WAS LOST IN THE CLOUDS. WHEN THE WEATHER IS CLEAR, YOU CAN STILL SEE A FEW TRACES OF THE NETWORK.



APRIL 16th. AN ODD NOSTALGIA HAS SWEEPED OVER URBICAND. MORE AND MORE PEOPLE ARE SETTING UP TELESCOPES AND SPENDING HOURS AT A TIME OBSERVING THE DISTANT BARS.



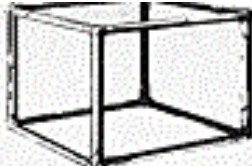
SOME HAVE EVEN ATTEMPTED TO SCALE THE LAST FEW BARS, DESPITE THE EXTREME PERIL INVOLVED. THEY SAY SEVERAL PEOPLE HAVE GONE UP AND NEVER RETURNED.



URBICAND
IS WITH YOU
KARL!



MYSTIC CULTS ARE FORMING, HERALDING THE RETURN OF THE NETWORK. THEIR MEMBERS TRY TO REPRODUCE ITS "TRY" WITH BIZARRE INSTRUMENTS, HOPING TO LURE IT BACK. OTHERS PERFORM COMPLEX CALCULATIONS AND PREDICT THE DATE IT WILL REAPPEAR.



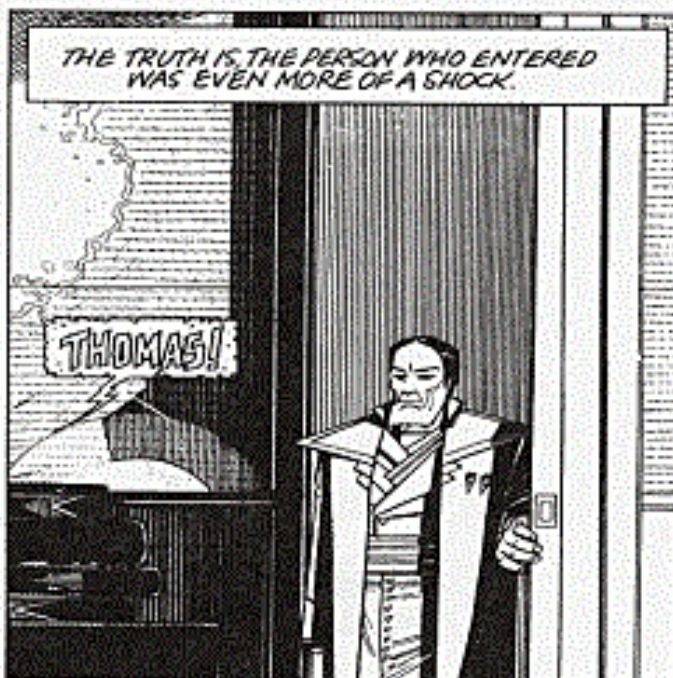
APRIL 27th.
THIS MORNING I WAS SURPRISED BY
A KNOCK ON THE DOOR. I WASN'T
EXPECTING ANYONE...



IS THAT YOU,
SOPHIE?

THE QUESTION JUST
SLIPPED OUT. IT
WASN'T SOPHIE.
WHY SHOULD IT BE?

THE TRUTH IS, THE PERSON WHO ENTERED
WAS EVEN MORE OF A SHOCK.



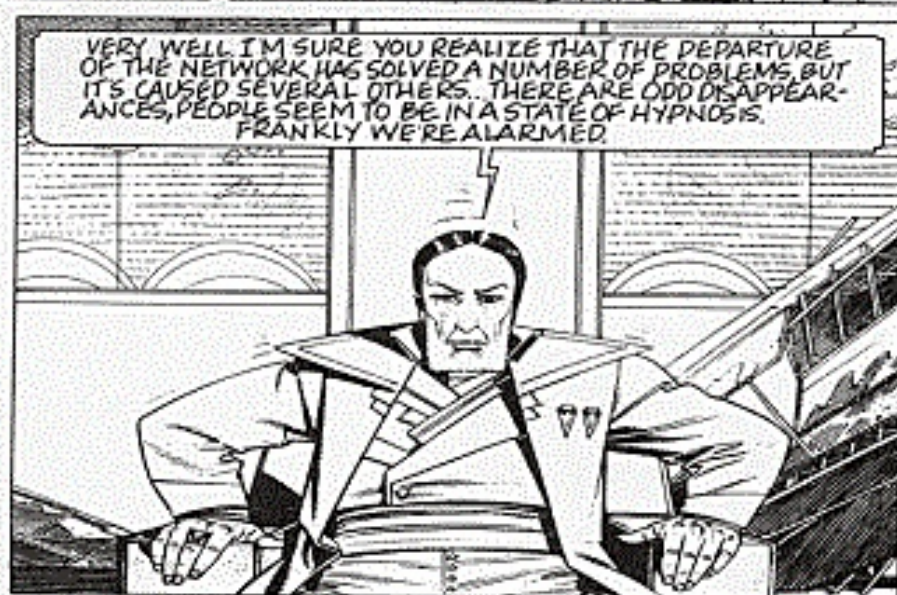
THOMAS!



ER, EXCUSE ME, EUGEN
FOR DROPPING IN WITH-
OUT AN APPOINTMENT, I...

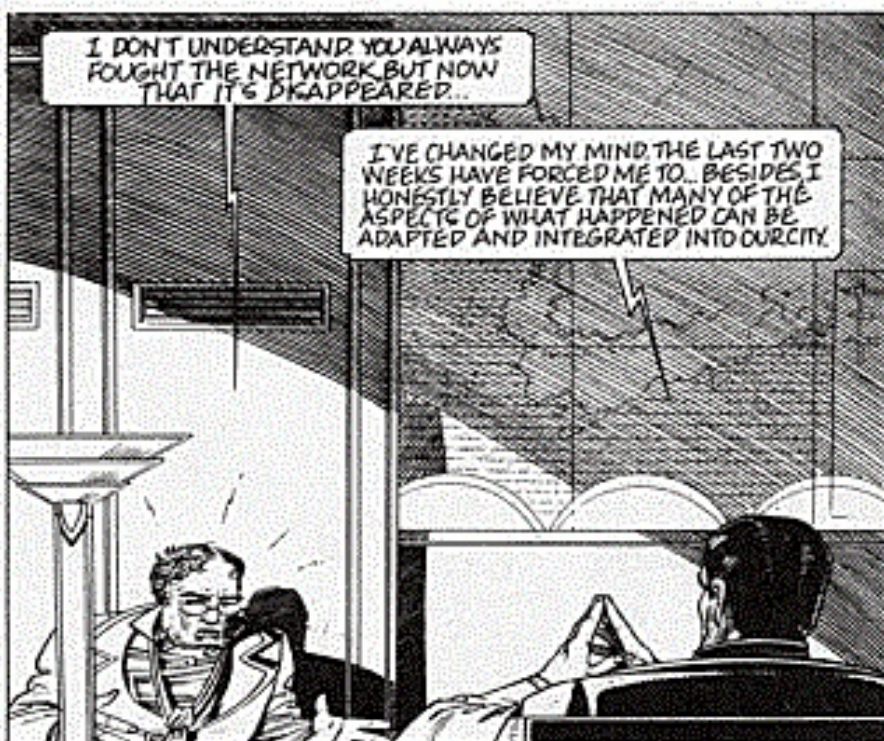
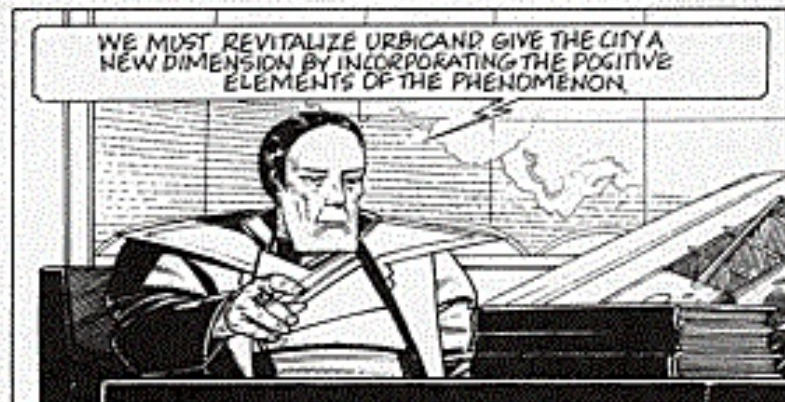
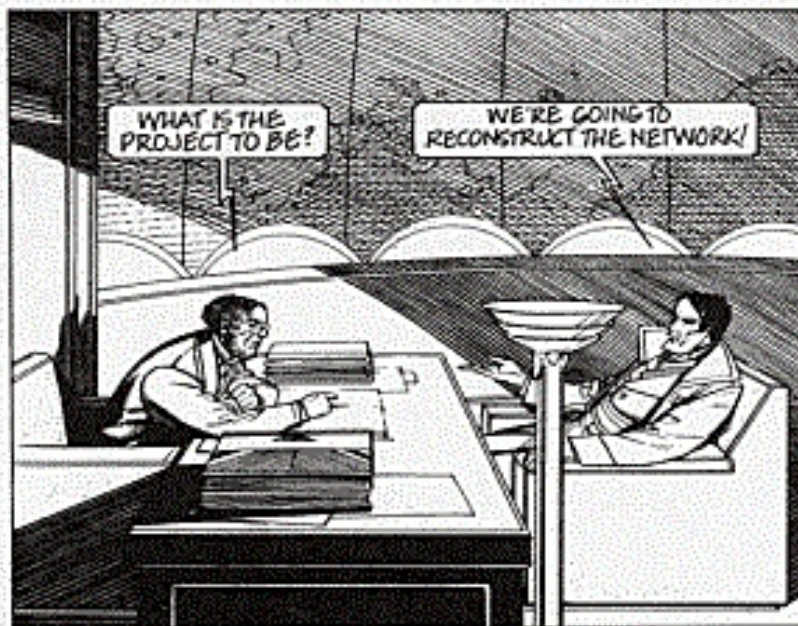
SIT DOWN, TELL ME
WHY YOU'VE COME.

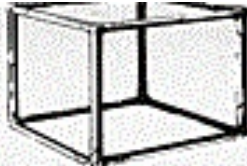
VERY WELL, I'M SURE YOU REALIZE THAT THE DEPARTURE
OF THE NETWORK HAS SOLVED A NUMBER OF PROBLEMS, BUT
IT'S CAUSED SEVERAL OTHERS. THERE ARE ODD DISAPPEAR-
ANCES, PEOPLE SEEM TO BE IN A STATE OF HYPNOSIS.
FRANKLY WE'RE ALARMED.



I KNOW ALL THAT. WHAT DOES
IT HAVE TO DO WITH ME?







EVERY STEP OF THE WAY! I DON'T SEE WHY YOU SHOULDN'T. IT'S GOING TO BE MONUMENTAL WORK. IT COULD BE THE PINNACLE OF YOUR CAREER. YOU WOULD HAVE UNLIMITED RESOURCES AND THIS TIME I ASSURE YOU THE COMMISSION WON'T GET IN YOUR WAY.



I UNDERSTAND YOU MADE A MAP. WE COULD USE IT TO PLAN THE RECONSTRUCTION.



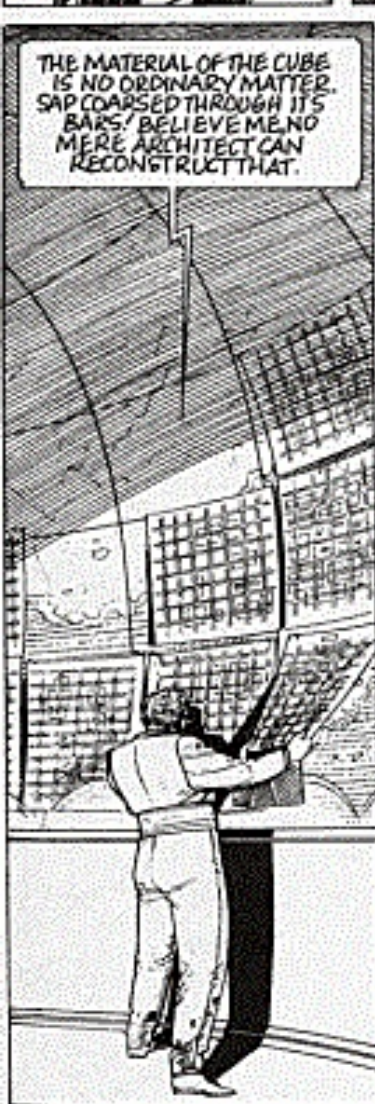
THERE'S NOT GOING TO BE ANY RECONSTRUCTION! THOMAS, THAT NETWORK WASN'T BUILT, IT SIMPLY APPEARED THEN GREW. NOW IT'S EXPANDED TO OTHER SPHERES...



RECONSTRUCT IT? THE ATTEMPTS I MADE DURING THE LAST FEW MONTHS TO STABILIZE SOME OF THE BARS JUST SERVE TO PROVE HOW RIDICULOUS YOUR IDEA IS.



THE MATERIAL OF THE CUBE IS NO ORDINARY MATTER. SAP COARSE THROUGH ITS BARS. BELIEVE ME, NO MERE ARCHITECT CAN RECONSTRUCT THAT.



WE'LL USE SOMETHING ELSE, EUGEN. SOMETHING BETTER, MAYBE...



HERE'S MY MAP. TAKE IT. IT WON'T DO YOU ANY GOOD, BUT DON'T COUNT ON GETTING ANY HELP FROM ME.

VERY WELL!



GOOD-BYE, EUGEN. BUT I STILL DON'T WANT TO ACCEPT YOUR REFUSAL AS FINAL.

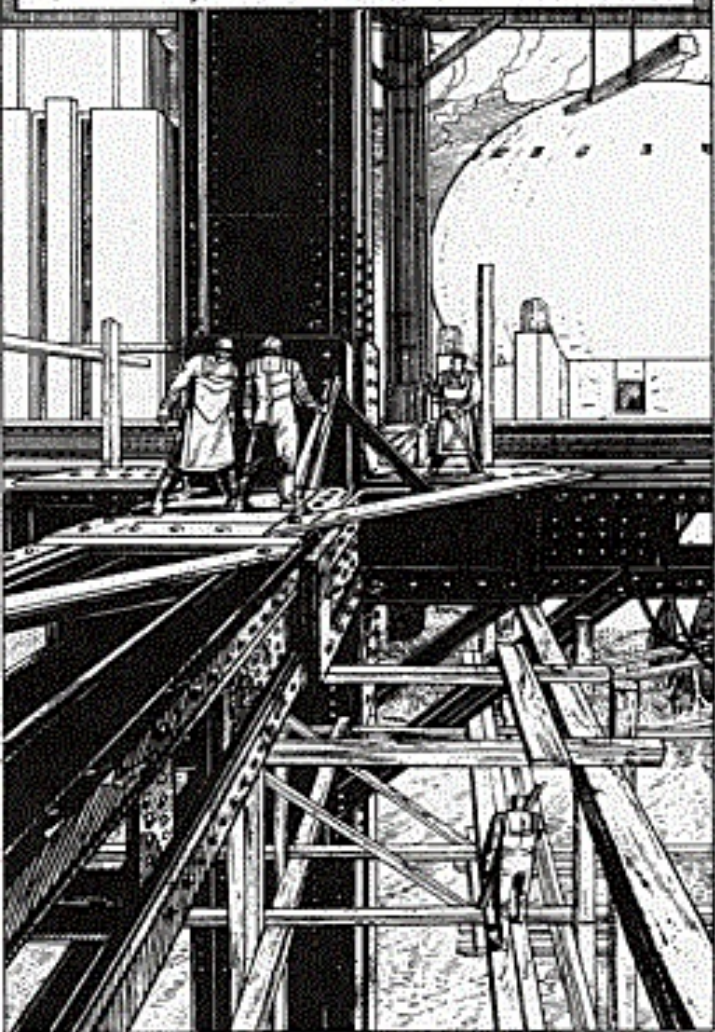
FORGET IT! YOU'LL HAVE TO MANAGE WITHOUT ME.



MAY 12th.
THEY'VE STARTED CONSTRUCTION ON THEIR NEW
NETWORK, CALLING ON UNBELIEVABLE RESOURCES



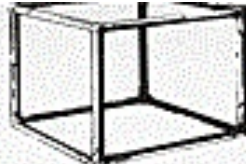
MAY 17th.
THEIR SCAFFOLDING PROGRESSES EVERY DAY,
CUTTING THROUGH OUR HOUSES, JUTTING OUT OVER
OUR STREETS, FORMING BRIDGES ACROSS THE RIVER.



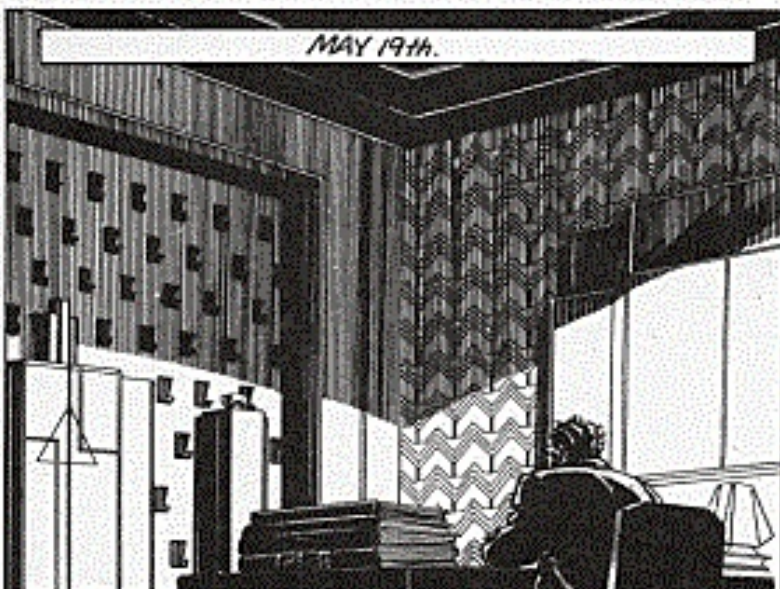
BUT I KNOW THEY ARE DOOMED TO FAIL AT BEST.
THEY'LL COME UP WITH A GROTESQUE CARICATURE
OF THE PHENOMENON WHICH EXISTED AMONG US.



AS I SEE IT NOW, THERE IS ONLY ONE
METHOD THAT COULD POSSIBLY SUCCEED



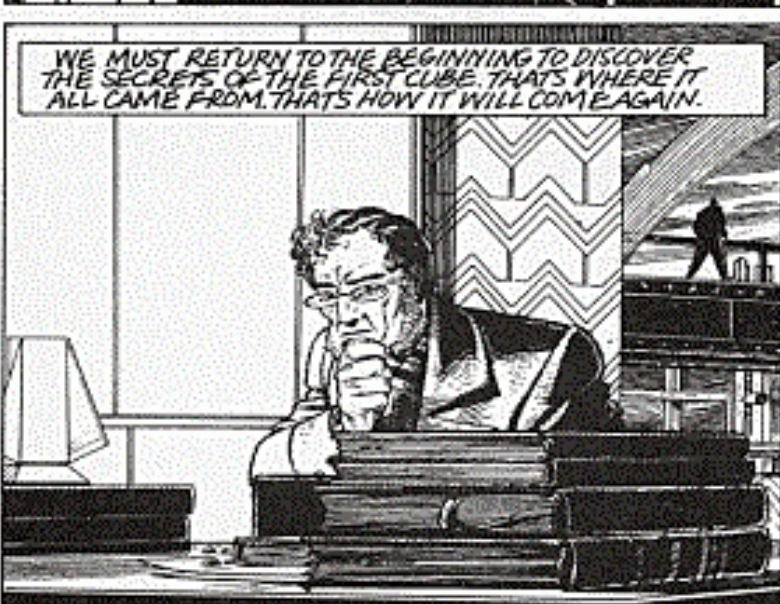
MAY 19th.



YESTERDAY I BEGAN TO CREATE A NEW CUBE, AS SIMILAR AS POSSIBLE TO THE ONE KLAUS AND FRIEDRICK PLACED ON MY TABLE THAT MORNING.



WE MUST RETURN TO THE BEGINNING TO DISCOVER THE SECRETS OF THE FIRST CUBE. THAT'S WHERE IT ALL CAME FROM. THAT'S HOW IT WILL COME AGAIN.



RIGHT NOW THE NETWORK CONTINUES TO GROW OUTSIDE THIS CITY, THIS HOUSE, THIS ROOM WHERE IT BEGAN. IT WEAVES ITS LINKS BETWEEN DISTANT STARS. IF I'M RIGHT IT CAN ALL BEGIN ANEW.



IT WILL BE A LONG ROAD FULL OF PITFALLS, BUT ONE DAY I'LL MANAGE. AND ON THAT DAY, WE'LL LIVE AGAIN...



• END •

FRANCOIS SCHUITEN

Born in 1956, Belgian artist Francois Schuiten published his first comic story at age 16 in *Pilote*. He later studied under Claude Renard in Brussels, which led to a series of books with Renard, *Aux Medianes de Cymbola* and *Le Rail*, published in *Metal Hurlant* magazine in 1980.

Meanwhile, a meeting of the minds with Belgian writer Benoit Peeters, one of the leading Herge (*Tintin*) experts, and a fine writer in his own right, led to a first collaboration, *Les Murailles de Samaris* (*The Great Walls of Samaris*), published in the magazine *A Suivre* in 1981.

The book became the first volume in a series entitled *Les Cites Obscures* (*The Dark Cities*), comprised of *The Fever of Ubrbikand*, *The Archivist*, *The Tower* and, last year, the remarkable *The Road to Arminia*, an exquisite blending of traditional comics with the illustrated novel.

In addition to his collaboration with Peeters, Schuiten has also illustrated another beautiful series written by his older brother, Luc. Both *Carapaces* and *La Terre Creuse*, which take place in a hollow world, were published by *Metal Hurlant*.

Francois Schuiten is today considered one of the most remarkable new artists to have appeared on the comics scene in the last five years.

BENOIT PEETERS

Benoit Peeters is a young Belgian writer who has distinguished himself as a novelist, scholar, journalist, and as the author of numerous comic book stories.

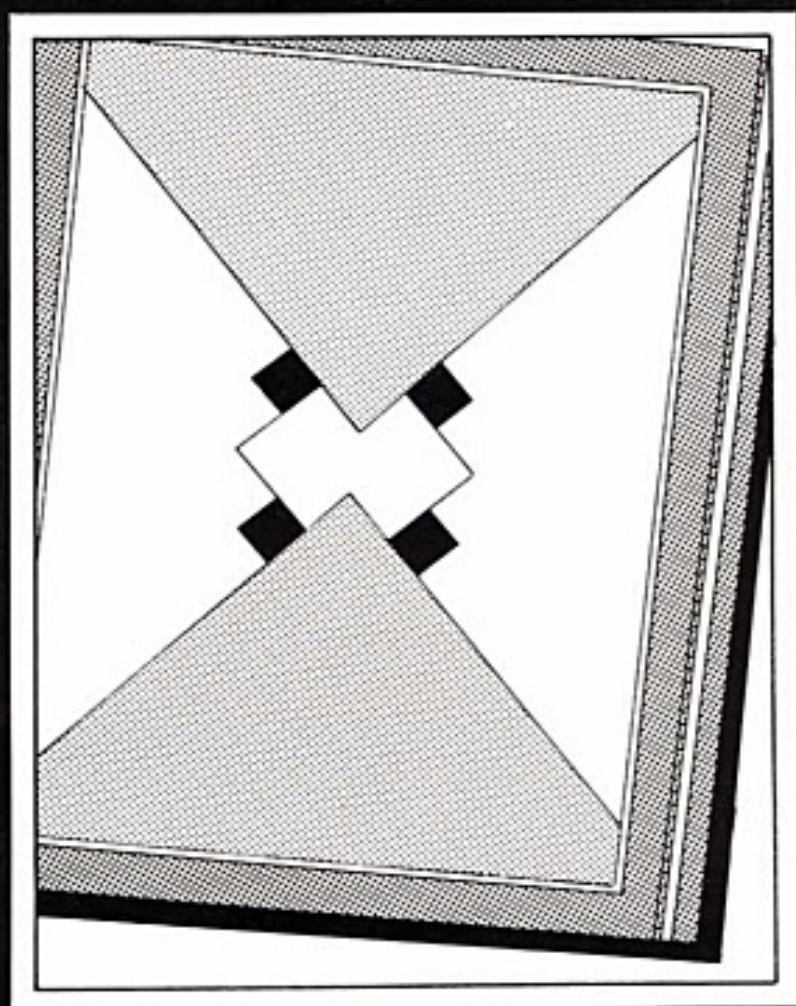
Peeters, the novelist, began his writing career with *Omnibus*, published in 1976. That first novel was followed by *La Bibliotheque de Villers* (*Villers' Library*) (1980) and, more recently, *L'Irresistible Bibliographie Critique et Polissonne de Carl-Emmanuel Derain...* (*The Irresistible Critical and Naughty Bibliography of Carl-Emmanuel Derain...*: the actual title of the book goes on for another couple of lines!), a satirical novel written in collaboration with Christian Ruller.

Peeters, the scholar, is one of Europe's best authorities on the famous comics character Tintin, and his creator, Herge. Peeters wrote the definitive *Le Monde d'Herge* (*Herge's World*) in 1983, followed by *Les Bijoux Ravis* (*The Stolen Jewels*), a modern literary analysis of Tintin in general, and of the story *The Castafiore's Emerald*, in particular.

Peeters, the journalist, is the author of the texts of an impressive series of books collecting photographs by gifted photographer Marie-France Plissart. The first was *Correspondence* in 1981, followed by *Fugues* (actually a photo-novel) in 1983, *Droit de Regards* (*Right to See*), *Prague* and *Le Mauvais Oeil* (*The Evil Eye*).

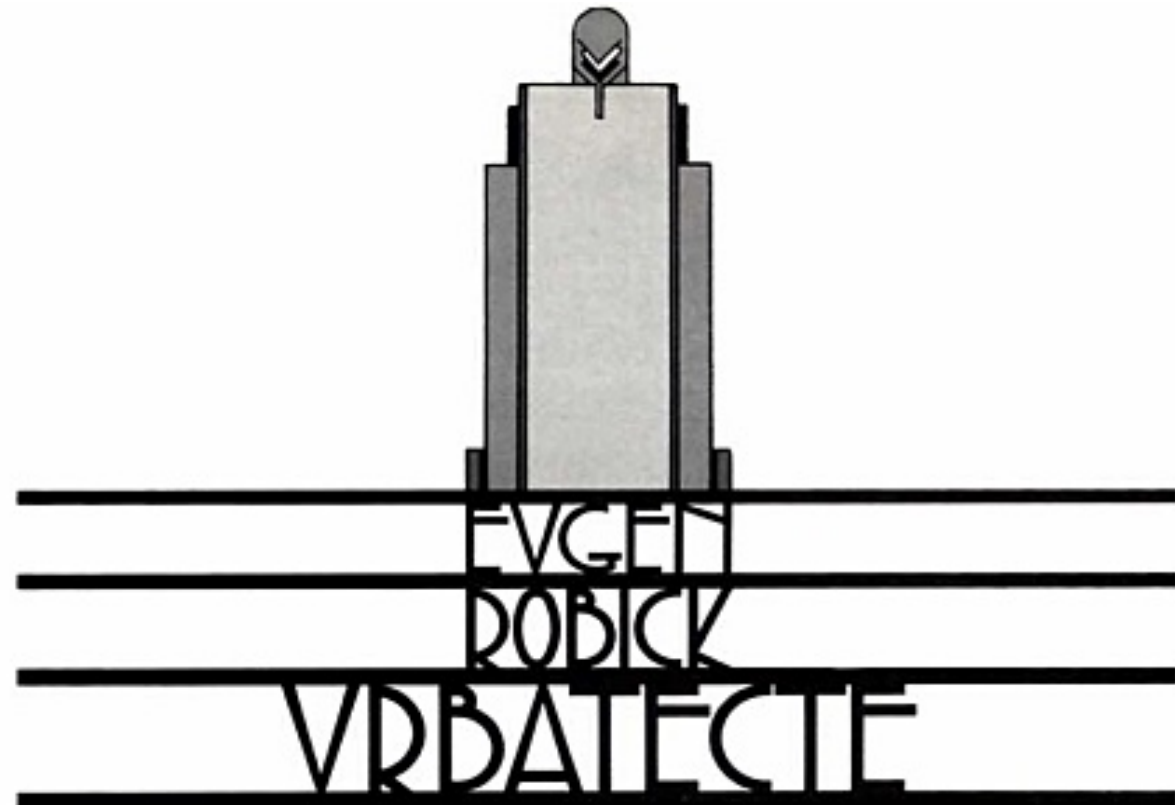
Peeters, the comics writer, is mostly known for his Dark Cities series, created jointly with Francois Schuiten. The series began in 1981 with *The Walls of Samaris*, and has since then continued with *The Fever of Urbikand*, *The Archivist*, *The Tower* and *The Road to Arminta*. Peeters has also collaborated with artist Patrick Deubelbeiss on two more graphic novels, and has written a book on how to write for comics for the Brussels University in Belgium.





EXTRAS

THIS LETTER APPEARS AT START OF THE STORY IN THE ORIGINAL FRENCH ALBUM, BUT WAS LEFT OUT OF THE ENGLISH VERSION FOR SOME REASON.



A LA COMMISSION DES HAUTES INSTANCES

Urbicande, ce XVIII juin

Monsieur le Rapporteur,
Messieurs les Commissaires,

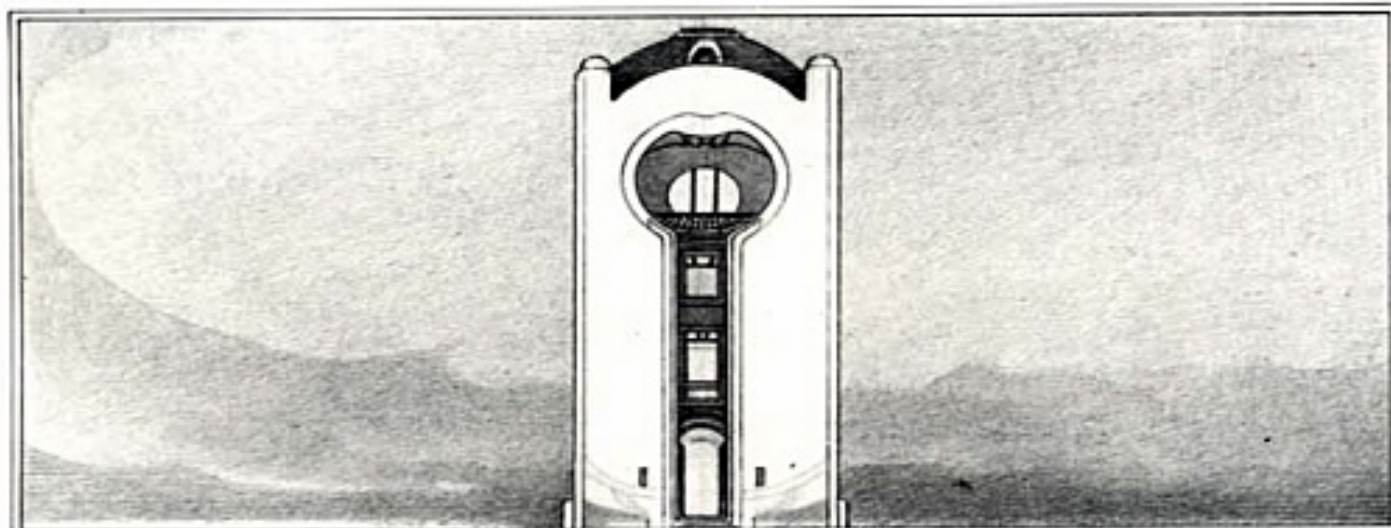
Notre ville est aujourd'hui parvenue à un degré de développement et d'accomplissement qui, partout, suscite l'admiration et, en plus d'un point, la jalousie.

Ses larges avenues, ses façades harmonieuses, ses jardins majestueux reflètent parfaitement la paisible grandeur d'un Pouvoir dont vous avez l'honneur, et la charge, d'être les plus illustres représentants.

Vous le savez mieux que moi : il n'en a pas toujours été ainsi.

Faut-il vous rappeler l'état ancien de notre ville, ce hideux magma où des édifices d'un modernisme absurde jaillissaient au milieu de taudis incohérents ? Le pittoresque et l'extravagance régnaient en maîtres, pour le plus grand chagrin des regards avertis.

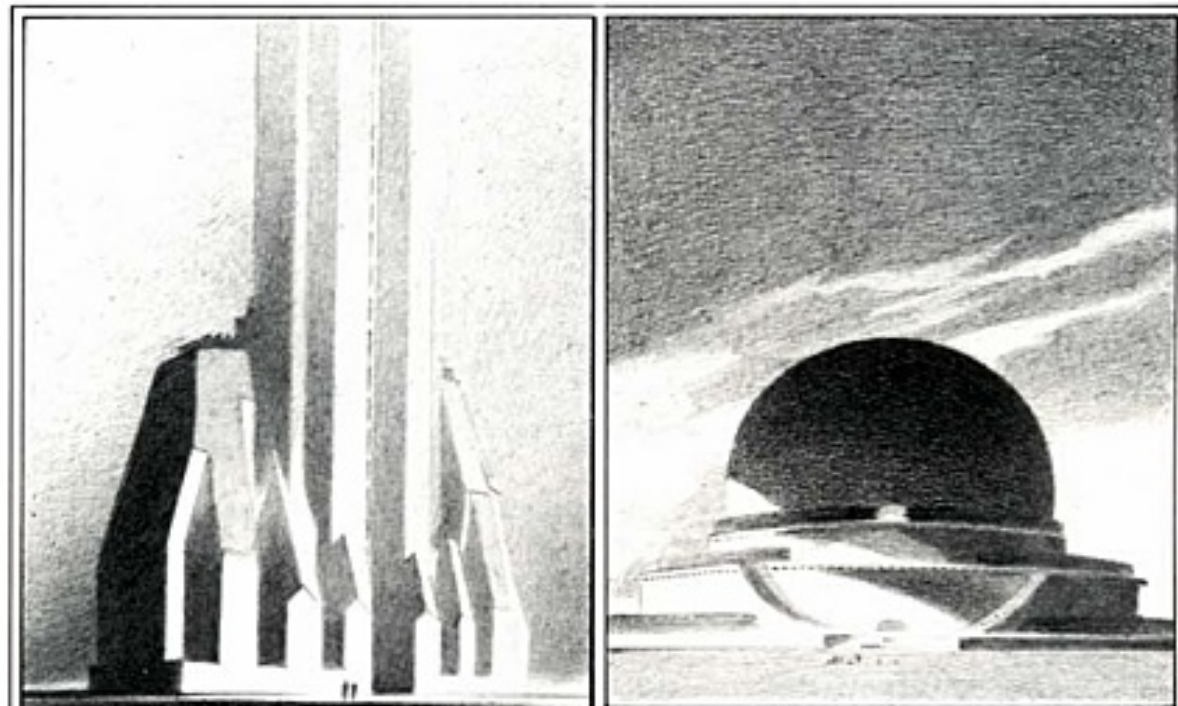
Moi-même, je dois l'avouer, je n'ai pas immédiatement pris conscience des grandeurs et des servitudes de ma fonction. Dans ma jeunesse, berné par les fallacieuses théories des architectes de Xhystos et de Tharo, je succombai un moment aux charmes troubles de l'arabesque.



L'UN DE MES PREMIERS TRAVAUX
ROMPRE SANS CRAINTE AVEC SON PASSÉ

Je ne tardai pas à me ressaisir pourtant, et à découvrir la nature profonde de notre art. Je compris qu'en toutes circonstances la simplicité était préférable à l'affectation, qu'un seul effet développé avec constance valait mieux que mille trouvailles, qu'à chaque instant surtout l'idée

d'ensemble devait primer le souci du détail. Les temples grecs et les pyramides égyptiennes n'obéissaient pas à d'autres règles. Ces principes, il nous faut aujourd'hui les appliquer en intégrant les stupéfiantes possibilités que nous offrent les techniques et les matériaux de notre temps.

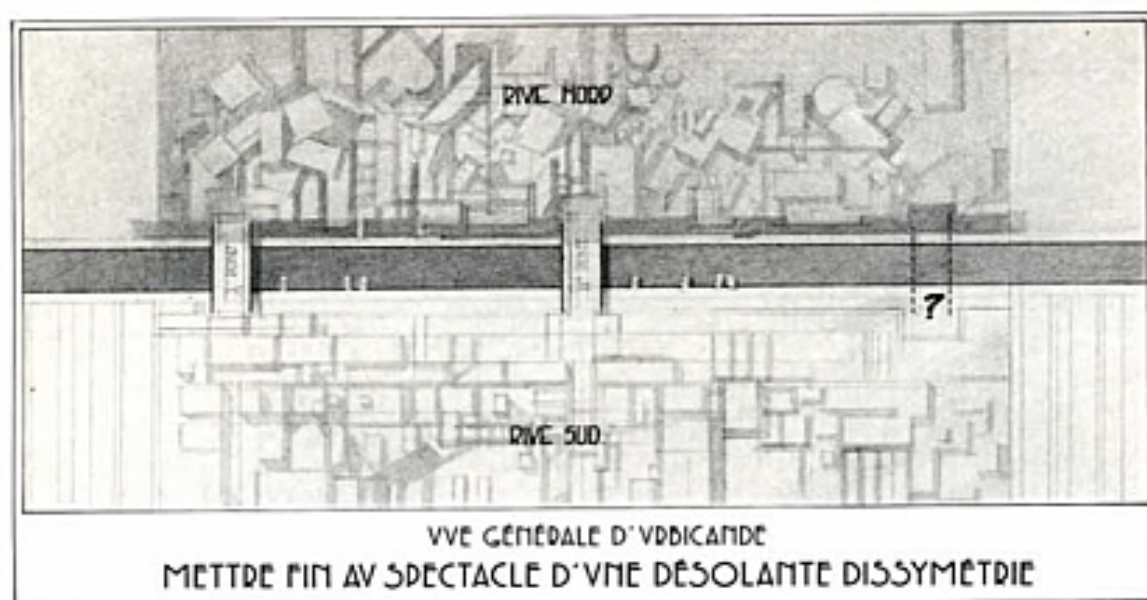


ÉTUDE D'APRÈS HUGH FERRISS ET E.L. BOVLLÉE
S'INSPIRER SANS RELÂCHE DES GRANDS MAÎTRES

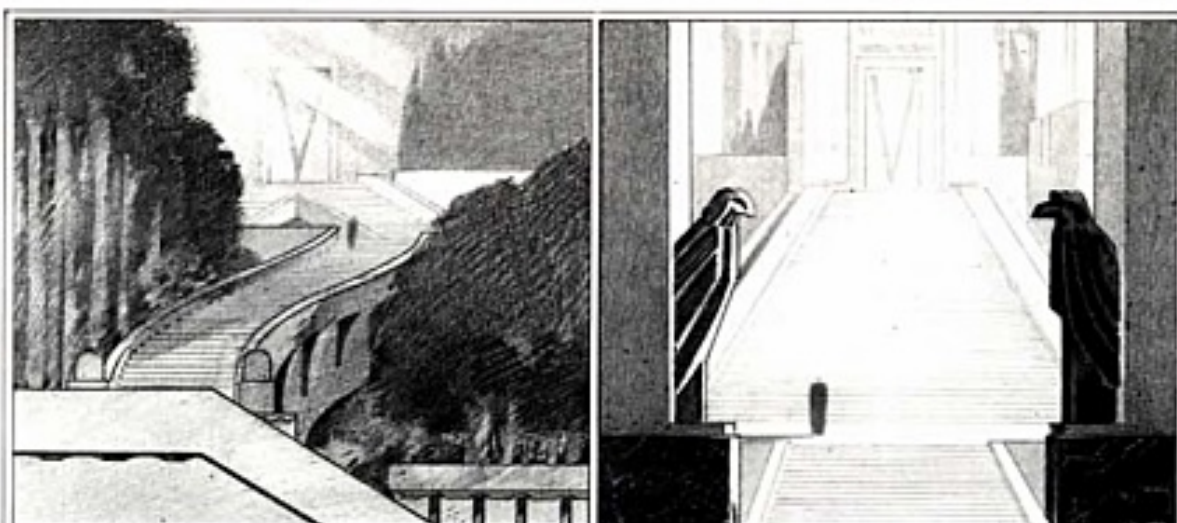
Grâce à votre généreux soutien, à la confiance que vous m'avez prodiguée, mon idéal a pu se concrétiser dans la pierre et l'essentiel de mes vues se trouver réalisé.

Il me faut néanmoins le constater : ce vaste mouvement d'édification s'est maintenant ralenti et certains des projets qui me tiennent le plus à cœur restent inexplicablement en suspens, laissant subsister au cœur de notre ville d'incompréhensibles taches, qui déparent tout l'ensemble.

Je pense d'abord, vous l'aurez compris, à la question du Troisième Pont, pièce indispensable de la charpente, prévue dès les premiers plans, et dont vous-même avez, voici deux ans, contresigné l'avant-projet.



Je connais les raisons qui vous ont conduits à séparer les deux Rives. Vous savez que je les accepte. Il n'empêche que l'édification de ce nouveau point de passage est aujourd'hui indispensable. Des extensions gigantesques ont été, ces dernières années, construites dans la partie Est d'Urbicande, transformant de manière considérable la structure de notre ville. L'harmonie qui naguère s'établissait avec les deux ponts est aujourd'hui rompue. Un quartier complet paraît basculer dans le vide, faisant ressembler Urbicande à un grand oiseau blessé qui voudrait ne voler que d'une aile. Il suffit du reste que l'on gagne les hauteurs pour que ce déséquilibre se révèle de manière criante.



L'ALLÉE DES TILLEULS AVANT ET APRÈS LA RÉGULARISATION
TRANSFORMÉE LE CHAOS EN HARMONIE

Imagine-t-on le déplorable effet qu'une telle dissymétrie peut créer chez le voyageur qui s'avance vers Urbicande ? Depuis des jours il marchait, tout rempli de la vision de cette ville dont si souvent on lui avait parlé. Voici qu'enfin il arrive et l'image qui s'offre à lui est le plus désolant des tableaux, celui que pas un peintre n'aurait consenti à montrer. C'est la mort dans l'âme, convaincu d'avoir été dupé, que notre visiteur fait son entrée dans Urbicande. Peut-être même n'y pénètre-t-il pas, se détournant sans plus attendre de cette cité qui d'emblée l'a déçu...

Pardonnez-moi ce soudain emportement ! Je ne cherche qu'à vous faire sentir ma tristesse et comprendre l'importance de l'enjeu.

Un autre motif augmente encore ma déception : l'impossibilité où nous nous trouvons de nous attaquer à notre plus grand projet tant que la question du Troisième Pont n'a pas trouvé sa solution.

Vous ne l'ignorez pas : c'est à l'aménagement de la Rive Nord que je fais ici allusion.



Est-il concevable, je le demande, qu'une moitié de notre ville, à l'exception de quelques avenues, soit, depuis si longtemps, demeurée à l'abandon ? Imagine-t-on que Delphes aurait laissé à l'état d'esquisse la moitié de son sanctuaire ? Croit-on que les Romains construisirent à demi le Colisée ou que les Alaxiens laissèrent en ruines la seconde de leurs collines ?

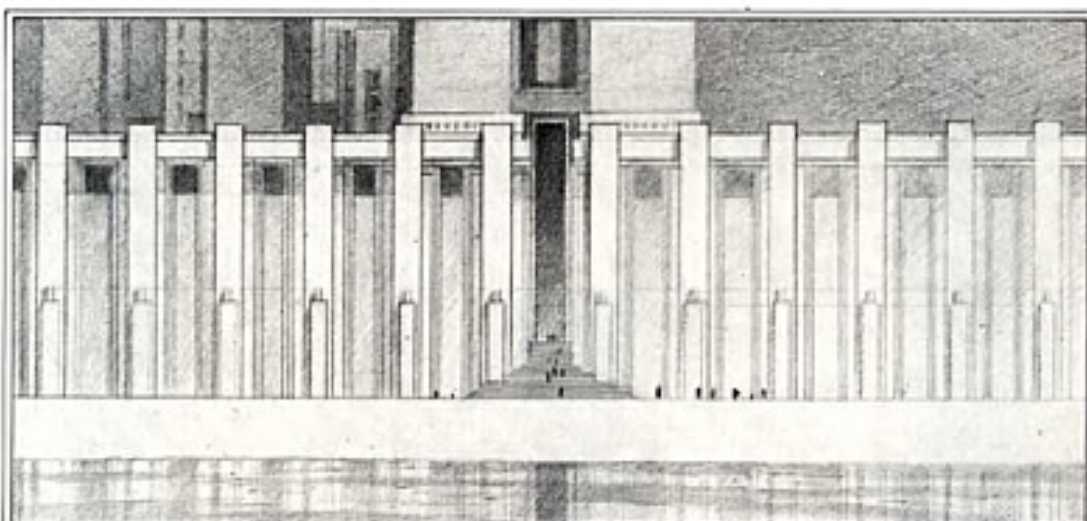
La Rive Nord est aujourd'hui le chancre qui ronge notre Cité. Le désordre de ces bâtiments d'un autre âge, l'incroyable insalubrité de ces ruelles font, plus que jamais, le déshonneur de notre ville. Si l'on n'y prend garde, cette pourriture aura, un jour, anéanti tout l'édifice.

Résoudre l'épineux problème de l'ensoleillement, condition sine qua non d'un durable aménagement, ne me paraît plus impossible aujourd'hui.

Après avoir longuement tourné et retourné la question, j'en suis arrivé à une solution qui pourrait bien n'être pas sans intérêt : placés au dessus des plus hauts édifices de notre Rive, de gigantesques miroirs, qui renverraient sur la Rive Nord la lumière que nous recevons en abondance, résoudraient définitivement la question de l'ombre, augmentant ainsi la symétrie de notre ville en même temps qu'ils la couronneraient d'une sorte de diadème éclatant.

Nous pourrions alors entreprendre une véritable régularisation de ces quartiers, les soumettant aux principes de grandeur et d'harmonie qui ont fait la beauté de notre versant. Ce dernier projet

n'existe encore qu'à l'état de croquis. Quelques encouragements de votre part suffiraient pour qu'un plan détaillé soit promptement mis au point.



PROJET POUR L'AMÉNAGEMENT DE LA RIVE NORD
TRAVAILÉ ENSEMBLE À L'URBICANDE DE DEMAIN

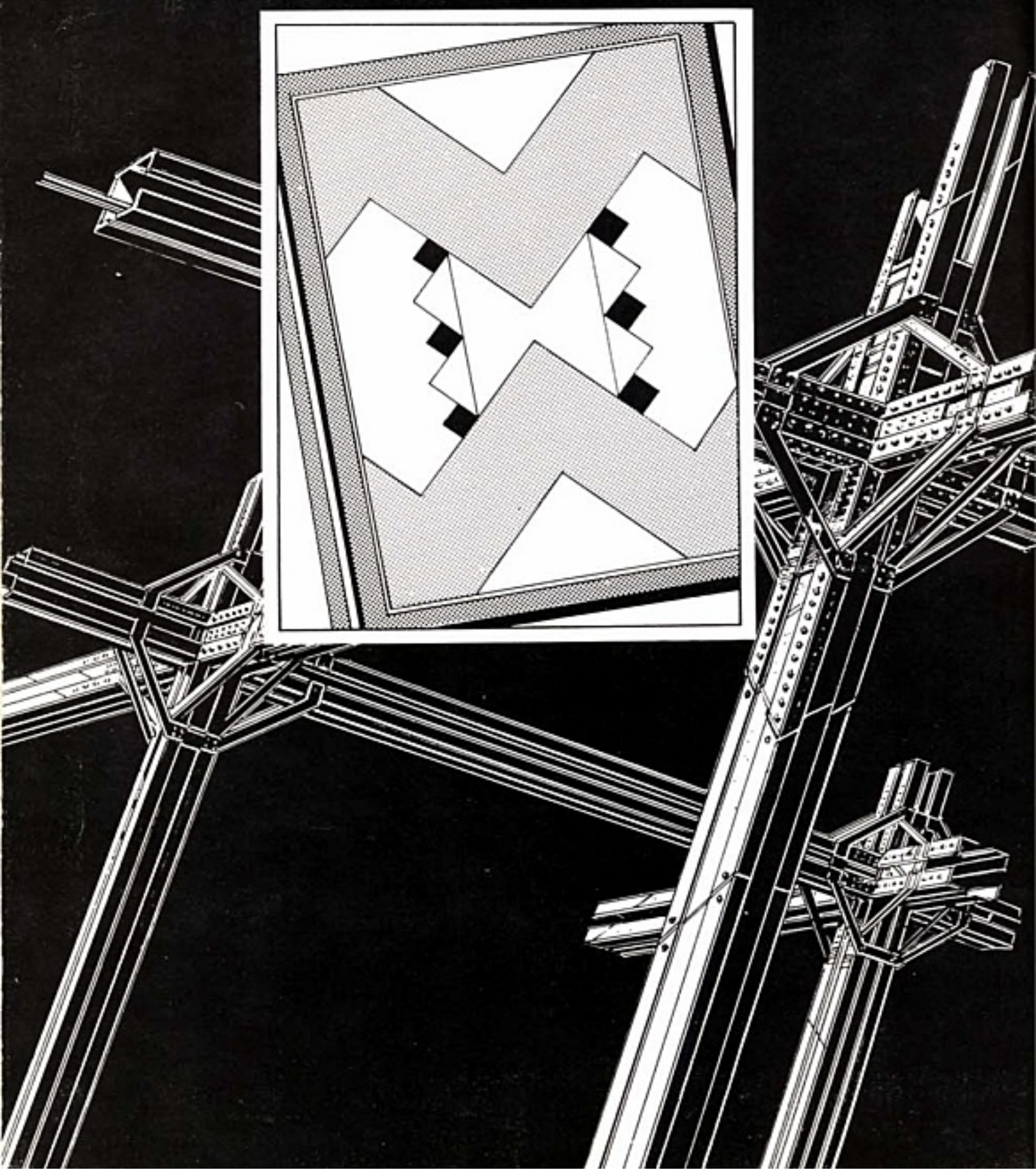
C'est pourquoi, Monsieur le Rapporteur, Messieurs les Commissaires, je me permets une fois encore d'intercéder auprès de vous pour que vous ne freiniez pas un programme de cette importance et que vous ne laissiez pas retomber les plus nobles enthousiasmes.

La vie est courte et la tâche est immense. Votre serviteur aimerait ne pas mourir avant d'avoir vu Urbicande étinceler de tous ses feux.

Confiant en la sagesse de votre jugement, je m'en remets à votre autorité et vous salue avec respect.

Votre Urbatecte,

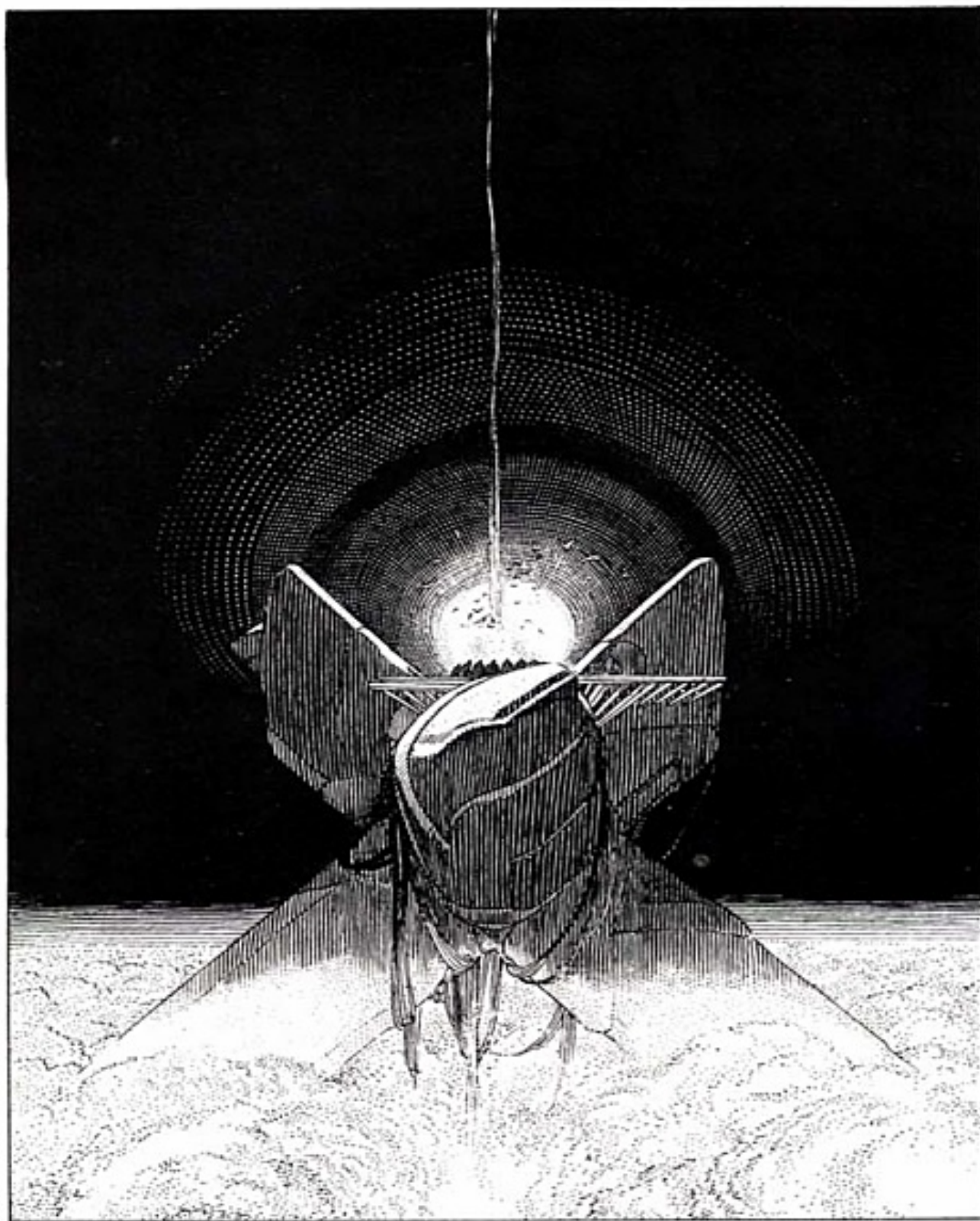
S. Robick



LA LEGENDE DU RESEAU



par Isidore Louis
*ancien chargé de recherches
à l'Institut Central des Archives*



Crémation rituelle au dessus de la jungle Septentrionale, peu avant la fin de la troisième Accalmie.

Depuis mon premier rapport sur les Cités obscures¹, si lacunaire et souvent si erroné, j'ai eu la chance de faire de nombreuses découvertes concernant la ville d'Urbicande et le phénomène du Réseau, au premier rang desquelles le récit illustré dont on vient de prendre connaissance. Je suis heureux que la réédition de cet ouvrage longtemps introuvable me permette aujourd'hui de revenir sur ces prodigieux événements.

La brusque interruption du journal d'Eugen Robick, à la date du 19 mai², ne peut que laisser le lecteur perplexe et au bord de la déception.

Plusieurs hypothèses ont été formulées pour expliquer cet inachèvement.

La première voudrait, tout simplement, que l'urbatectte, découragé, ait à ce moment sombré dans une dépression si profonde qu'il serait devenu incapable d'écrire.

La deuxième prétend qu'harcelé par les zéloteurs du nouveau pouvoir et ne supportant pas de voir Sophie épouser Thomas Broch, Robick aurait mis fin à ses jours le samedi 24 juin, un an exactement après que le cube lui avait été apporté.

La troisième est la plus tragique : c'est aussi la plus vraisemblable.

C'est Urbicande tout entier qui aurait été anéanti, un cataclysme majeur ayant, peu après les faits rapportés

1. Voir *L'Archiviste*, Editions Casterman, 1987.

2. L'année n'est malheureusement pas précisée, pour cette pièce comme pour tous les autres documents en provenance des Cités obscures. D'où l'impossibilité d'établir une chronologie complète des événements qui s'y sont déroulés.

Mais peut-être la constance de cette omission, dans des documents par ailleurs à ce point précis, n'est-elle pas accidentelle ? Peut-être le cadre temporel régissant la vie de tout ce Continent est-il à ce point différent du nôtre que toute indication d'année s'avérerait impossible...

La légende du réseau

dans ce Journal, fait disparaître de la carte des Cités obscures la plus orgueilleuse de ses métropoles.

Les supputations les plus crédibles sur ces sinistres événements, c'est dans un opuscule rarissime attribué à un certain R. de Brok, *Le mystère d'Urbicande*, qu'il m'a été donné de les découvrir :

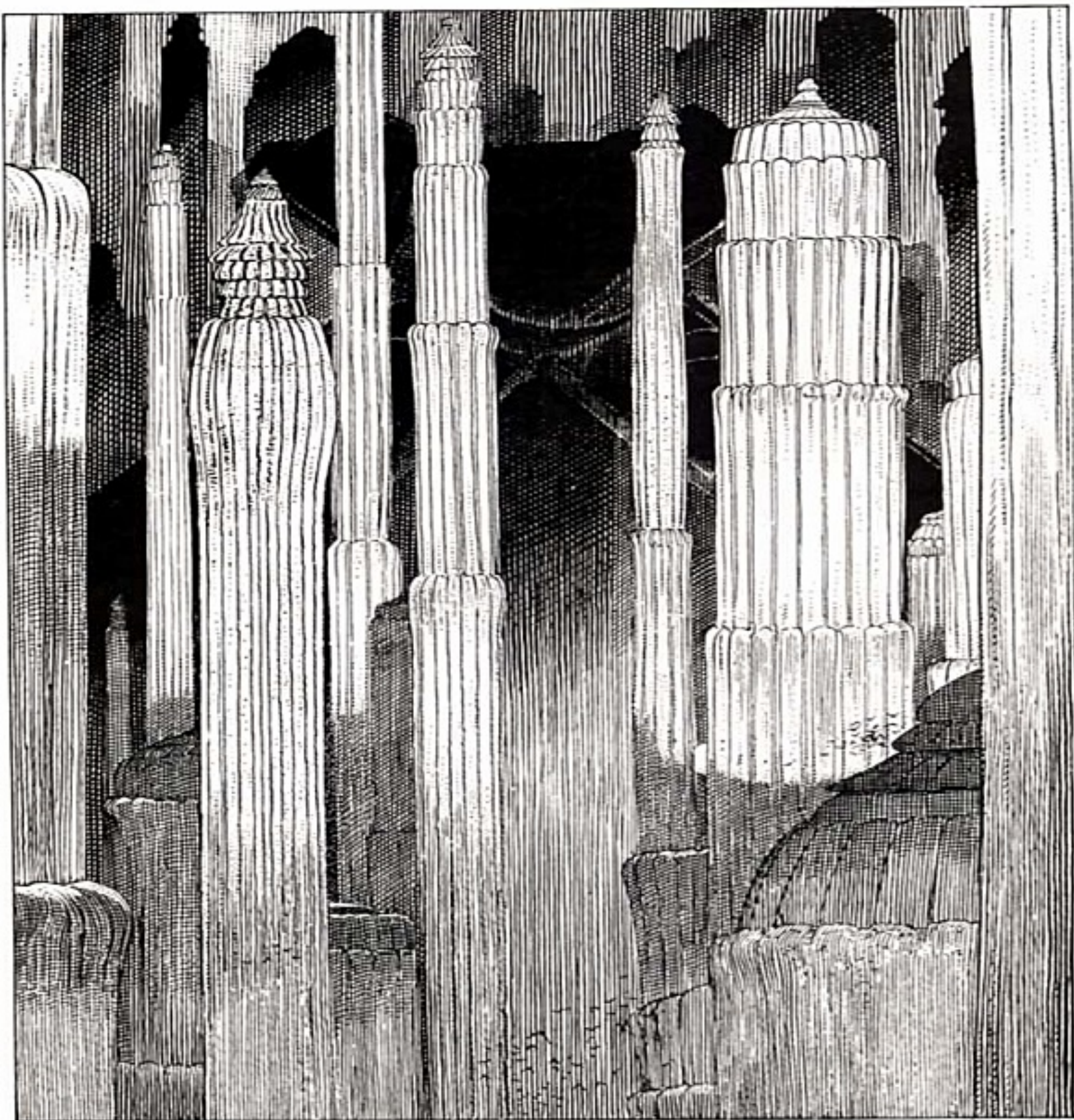
Catastrophe naturelle, affirment d'aucuns, et des études très précises sur les formes géologiques qui travaillent le sous-sol de cette région tourmentée semblent leur donner raison : on sait qu'Urbicande était bâtie sur une faille ; les sismologues s'accordent en général pour y voir une de ces fêlures de l'écorce terrestre susceptibles de propager des ondes catastrophiques.

Mais l'épouvantable confusion qui résulta à l'échelle du continent tout entier ne peut s'expliquer par un simple cataclysme naturel centré sur la région d'Urbicande. Autour d'Urbicande, toutes les Cités, de Sodrovni à l'Ouest jusqu'à Zor aux confins orientaux de la Mer des Silences, se sont barricadées durant de longues années contre les populations mises en branle de proche en proche par les "enfiévrés d'Urbicande". A l'exception des habitants des grandes Cités les plus lointaines et les mieux protégées, rares furent les survivants de cette terrible période³.

Que cette hypothèse soit ou non exacte, une chose est en tout cas certaine : après avoir envahi Urbicande, puis l'avoir libéré, le Réseau continua de se développer à travers le continent.

3. R. de Brok, *Le mystère d'Urbicande*, p. 11

Initialement publiée à 1900 exemplaires par les Presses de l'Académie des Sciences de Brüssel, cette plaquette aurait été l'objet, voici quelques années, d'une luxueuse réédition. Malgré mes efforts, je ne suis jamais parvenu à découvrir un exemplaire de ce nouveau tirage qui, selon toutes probabilités, est purement légendaire...



Au centre des tours de la cité fossilisée de Chula Vista.

Certes, l'auteur du *Mystère d'Urbicande* affirmait vouloir discréditer ce "mythe", mais, ainsi que je l'ai déjà montré dans mon premier rapport, il est clair qu'il ne cherchait en fait rien d'autre qu'à le renforcer encore.

Et du reste, les fort belles illustrations de Robert Louis Marie de la Barque qui accompagnaient son discours prouvent à l'envi la réalité du phénomène : leur caractère documentaire ne fait aucun doute.

Trois de ces images accompagnaient ma précédente publication : j'en produis ici trois autres.

L'acquit essentiel de ces documents est de nous montrer le Réseau en des points fort éloignés du Continent. On le vit apparaître dans le plateau désertique de Marahuaca, au large du Cap de Sodrovni, aux fins fonds de la forêt de Zogecâr et jusque dans les eaux glacées du Lac Vert. On le retrouva entre les falaises de Roth, dans la Jungle de Poznah, au milieu des tours de Chula Vista, au dessus des massifs volcaniques d'Ivalo.

Mieux : au verso de l'un de ces documents, on indique que le croquis a été réalisé "peu avant la fin de la Troisième Accalmie". La première de ces accalmies - mais qui aurait pu alors imaginer qu'elle ne serait pas la seule - fut longuement décrite par Robiek dans les quatrième et cinquième chapitres de son récit. Deux autres, au moins, survinrent donc par la suite, obéissant peut-être à une régularité du même ordre que celle qui présidait à la croissance du Réseau. On imagine les espoirs que firent naître ces phases d'immobilité ; les désillusions qui s'ensuivirent.

La chose est claire désormais : c'est toute la vie du Continent, pendant des mois ou des années, qui fut soumise au surgissement de ces gigantesques montants.

Laissons-là les questions historiques. Nous ne sommes pas en mesure de les éclairer davantage.

Le problème qui, aujourd'hui, se pose à nous de la façon la plus aigüe est celui de la signification de ce Réseau étrange, surgi d'on ne sait où.

Peu d'événements, à vrai dire, ont autant fait couler d'encre que l'inexorable croissance de cette structure élémentaire. Beaucoup des explications proposées ne sont que de pures fantaisies. Plusieurs, pourtant, méritent que l'on s'y arrête.

A.

L'hypothèse de Jean Loms : Une métaphore chimique

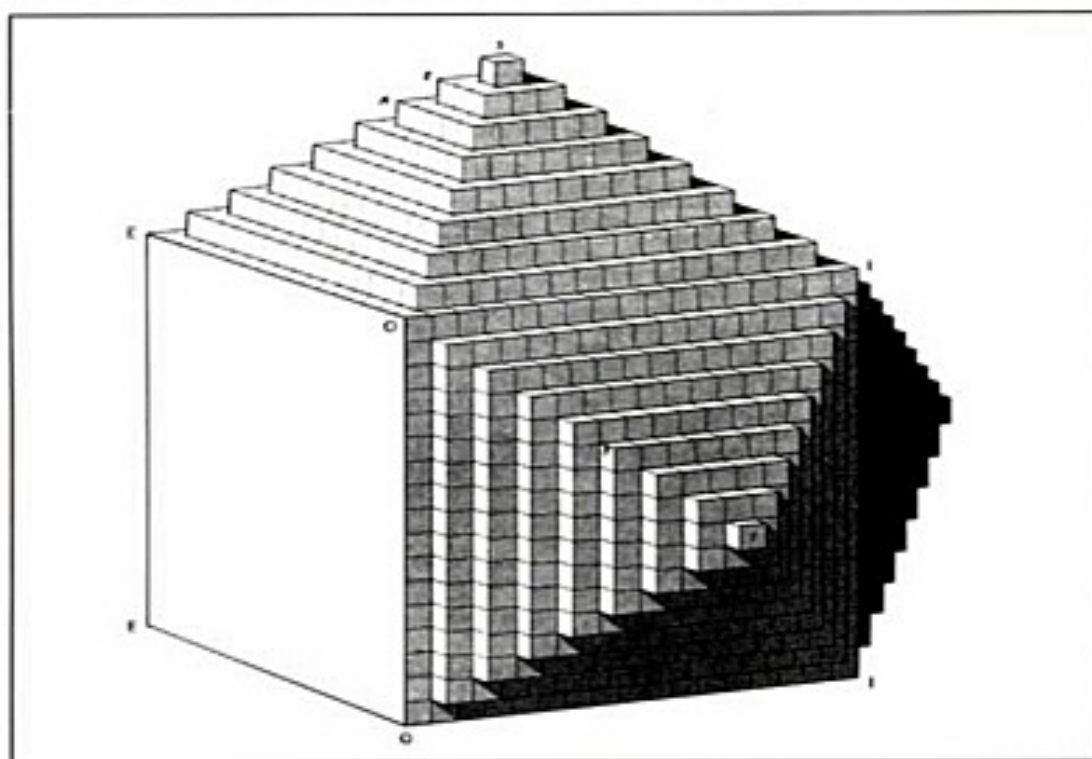
Dans le volume de *Mélange* qui, pour son soixantième anniversaire, fut consacré au professeur Jean Loms, le célèbre savant brüselois proposa une interprétation fort étonnante du phénomène du Réseau. Que le peu d'informations dont il disposait le lui ait fait considérer comme un événement purement mythique ne change rien à la justesse de son analyse.

Il n'est pas impossible que cette légende provienne de quelque théorie balbutiante antérieure aux travaux du cristallographe René Just Haüy, mais basée elle aussi sur l'observation intelligente des phénomènes de clivage. En fait, la description du "cube d'Urbicande" qui m'a été racontée si poétiquement par la vieille sorcière Alaxienne ressemble à s'y méprendre à la croissance

par empilement régulier de la molécule intégrante du sel gemme, NaCl, qui est un des exemples les plus simples qui soient de croissance cristalline (c'est le Pm 3 m, le premier des quatorze types de Réseaux tridimensionnels).¹

L'illustration accompagnant ce raisonnement était effectivement des plus troublantes.

Et, même si l'explication de Jean Loms est loin de rendre compte de l'ensemble du phénomène, il n'en reste pas moins que cette coïncidence entre la structure d'un minuscule corps cristallin et celle du gigantesque Réseau n'en finit pas de faire rêver.



1. *Mélange consacré au professeur Jean Loms, Presses de l'Académie des Sciences de Brüssel (épuisé).*

B.

**L'hypothèse de Brok :
la matérialisation d'un carcan**

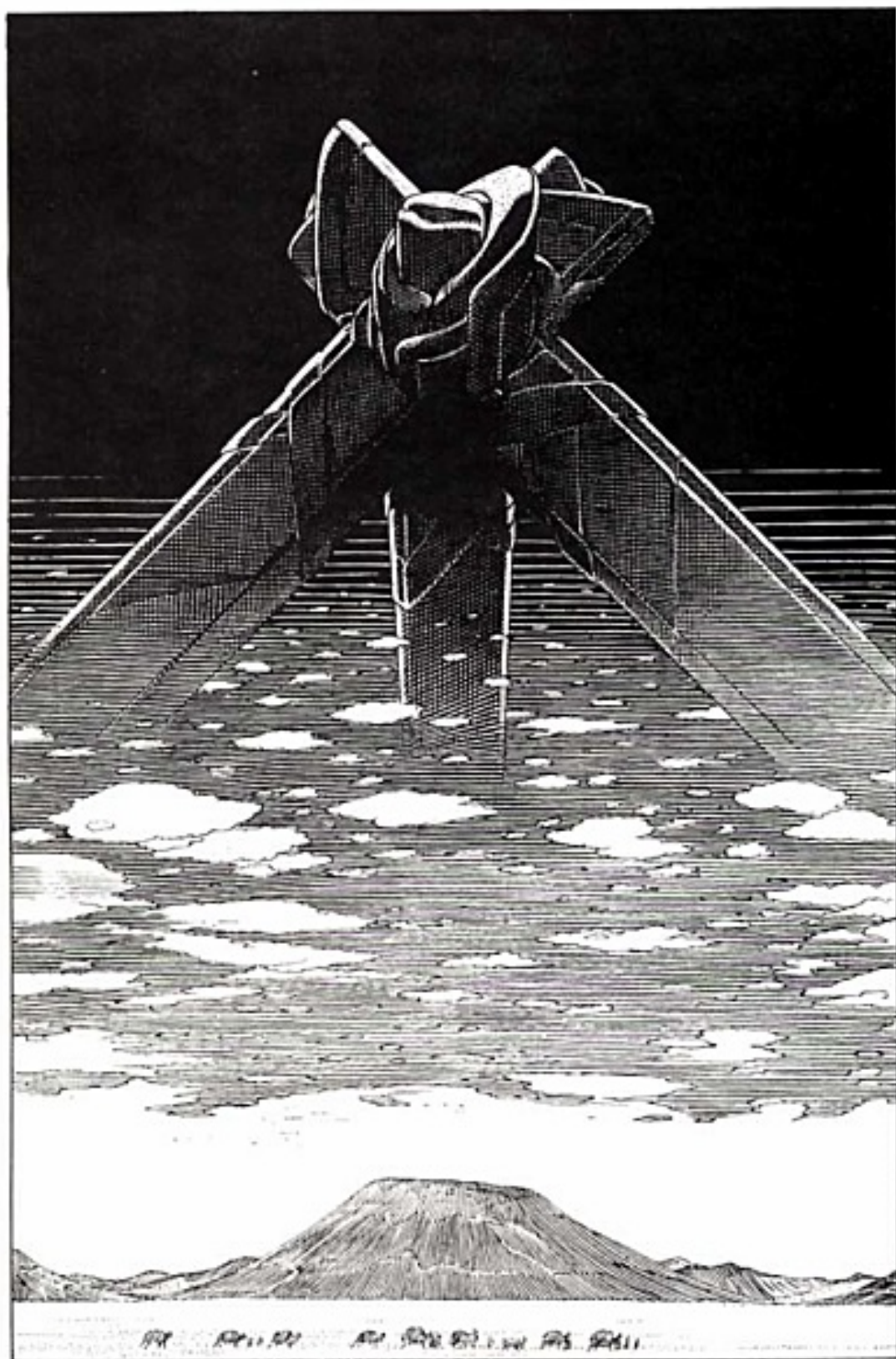
Dans son ouvrage déjà cité, de Brok lui-même propose une lecture des événements que je qualifierais volontiers de *psychophysique*.

Le Réseau ne serait selon lui rien d'autre que le prolongement fantasmatique de la rigidité et du totalitarisme qui régnaient à Urbicande peu avant que le Cube ne commence à y grandir.

La société d'Urbicande était parvenue à un équilibre politique, une méta-stabilité sociale proprement stupéfiants. Tous les témoignages fragmentaires dont nous disposons concordent sur ce point.

Si les philosophes et les savants se penchaient aujourd'hui sur cette question dans un état d'esprit plus dégagé des pressions du délire ambiant, ils parviendraient sans doute à nous expliquer comment des populations astreintes à vivre dans un "plan" ont pu voir se matérialiser les mailles du Réseau Idéologique et Philosophique qui les emprisonnaient, à nous faire comprendre comment cette hallucination collective a pu les faire basculer dans le camp le plus radicalement opposé à celui de l'ordre, l'équilibre et la planification : celui de la folie, de la destruction et du chaos⁵ !

5. R. de Brok, *Le mystère d'Urbicande*, op. cit., p. 15



Au-dessus du massif volcanique d'Ivalo, à hauteur des chemins de transhumance.

C.

L'hypothèse Brunon : les dix parcours

Enfin, comment ne pas citer, aussi fantaisistes qu'elles soient souvent et malgré les allusions peu compréhensibles qui s'y glissent, les interprétations que proposa Claude-Françoise Brunon des "Systèmes d'Urbicande". Elle ne suggère pas moins de dix lectures du phénomène !

1. PARCOURS ECOLOGIQUE, dit parcours vert : dans Urbicande, ville sans arbres, le Réseau se développe comme une plante bourgeonnante, imposant à une Culture déshumanisée le modèle d'une Nature triomphante. Sa croissance, commencée un 24 juin, jour du solstice, s'arrête en été mais reprend au printemps. Après sa disparition, l'homme nostalgique hésite entre un pastiche technologique et une récréation vivante à partir de la matière primordiale.

2. PARCOURS ALCHIMIQUE : Un raté dans le Grand Œuvre.

3. PARCOURS POLITIQUE : dans Urbicande, reflet du Pouvoir, le Réseau est un mouvement subversif de type anarchisant. Tous les pouvoirs en place sont détruits.

Mais après sa disparition, un nouveau pouvoir s'installe et tout est à recommencer.

Variante de 3 : Le Réseau, c'est 68!⁶

6. Allusion peu claire. A quoi ce nombre peut-il se référer ? (certes, l'album comporte 68 pages dessinées, mais j'avoue néanmoins ne guère saisir le rapport...)

4. PARCOURS IDEOLOGIQUES DIVERS

a - Deux classes séparées par un profond fossé de niveau économique et politique. Le Réseau, inéluctable et structuré comme la Révolution, vient résoudre les antinomies dialectiques et poser les jalons d'une autre société. Les lendemains chanteront-ils ?

b - Dans une société capitaliste et pré-nazie, avec la complicité objective d'individualistes décadents, une structure dissidente s'impose et conduit droit au fascisme.

c - Dans une société évoluée proche de la perfection, avec la complicité d'individus tarés et ethniquement suspects, un groupe bolchevique infiltré sème la désolation. Mais l'ordre triomphera.

5. PARCOURS HARLEQUIN : Abandonné par la femme de sa vie, Eugen, architecte génial, devient fou !

6. PARCOURS ESOTERIQUE : Eugen, voulant reconstruire le Temple, s'est trompé de Voie. Voici que surgit une nouvelle pyramide. Sophie, incarnation dévoyée de la Pistis Sophia, représente la tentation d'une vaine ambition. Eugen la repousse et entreprend un retour aux sources.

Thomas choisit la voie technologique.

7. PARCOURS MESSIANIQUE : Le Réseau, c'est Dieu ! La preuve : ce que dit Eugen à la page 92 de son Journal : "Il est apparu. Il a grandi parmi nous..."

8. PARCOURS PURITAIN : Le Réseau, c'est le Diable ! La preuve : les bordels.

9. PARCOURS PSYCHANALYTIQUE : Dans un ensemble psychique dominé par le Sur-moi et par les inter-

aits, le Réseau se déploie phallickement. Entre l'image de la Mère (Sophie) et du Père (Thomas), Eugen, incapable d'agir, se replie et régresse. Une nouvelle naissance est-elle en vue ?

10. PARCOURS TELEPHONIQUE : Le Réseau, c'est le Réseau⁷ (demander aux abonnés).⁸



Oserai-je, quant à moi, ajouter à cette avalanche de gloses et d'exégèses une ultime interprétation ? Oui, car c'est de cette multiplicité même qu'est née l'hypothèse qu'en guise de conclusion je proposerai à mes lecteurs.

Aucune des lectures précédentes n'est en mesure d'épuiser le phénomène ; c'est dans l'incessant va-et-vient de l'une à l'autre, dans l'insatisfaction où laisse chacune d'elles, que réside la véritable leçon : rappeler aux hommes qu'ils vivent et continueront de vivre au milieu des ténèbres.

Métaphore ouverte autant qu'impénétrable, phénomène simplissime aux conséquences infinies, le Réseau serait l'étrange objet envoyé par nos dieux aux peuples des Cités obscures afin que la vanité, jamais, ne leur fasse oublier que l'Essentiel reste un Mystère et que l'Homme est peu de choses.

ISIDORE LOUIS

7. Ce dernier point reste pour moi parfaitement opaque. Sans doute s'agit-il de quelque allusion à des pratiques inconnues dans nos contrées.

8. Claude-Françoise Brunon, "les systèmes d'Urbicande", *Cahiers de l'Université Paul Valéry*.